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# REVELATION

## CONSIDERED AS LIGHT

# REVELATION

## CONSIDERED AS LIGHT

A Series of Discourses

111755

BY THE

RIGHT REV. ALEXANDER EWING,

D.C.L., OXON.;

BISHOP OF ARGYLL AND THE ISLES IN THE SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Christ is not to be considered as a mystery superadded to the mysteries of Nature and of Providence, but as their explanation, and the means whereby they may be borne.

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TO ONE

TO WHOM THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND OWES A DEBT

OF WHICH SHE IS SCARCE AWARE, AND WHICH

SHE CAN NEVER REPAY,

ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL TAIT, D.D.,

LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY,

THE COURAGEOUS AND CONSISTENT

DEFENDER OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND THE SIMPLICITY

WHICH IS IN CHRIST,

THESE DISCOURSES ARE DEDICATED BY

THEIR AUTHOR.

LONDON, *March 25th*, 1873.

# PREFACE.

THE following discourses can scarcely perhaps be called a "series" in the strict sense of the word, as there is no unbroken continuity in their order; but they proceed onward in the general course indicated in the title, "Revelation Considered as Light;" starting with Nature as the outcoming of Providence, they end with Christ as its complement and explanation.

The discourse on the Divine Government owes much to the writings of William Law, particularly to his treatise on the "Spirit of Prayer," which, now rarely seen, it would be a boon to many to have reproduced in a popular form, deprived of the more fanciful theories which disfigure its otherwise valuable and reasonable, as well as spiritual, aspects.

There are in one of the discourses some passages, which I cannot now identify, taken from the writings of that remarkable but unfortunate man, William Blake, who was evidently an earnest seeker after God.

I need scarcely say that, although the book is dedicated to the Archbishop of Canterbury, His Grace is in no way responsible for any of the sentiments which it contains.

The volume is published in connection with, but forms no part of, the series of "Papers for the Present Day," now being published by the Messrs. Strahan. Its objects are of the same nature, viz., to justify the ways of God to men, and to endeavour to realise the Being of the ever blessed God by that which is best within ourselves; the only satisfactory proof of His existence, as it is the only sufficient explanation of our own.

A. E., Bp.

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# I.

## THE UNKNOWN GOD.

"And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day."—GENESIS xxxii. 24.

WHETHER the transaction here related was real, as it would seem to have been from the fact of Jacob's subsequent lameness and the custom of the Israelites of not eating that part of the thigh of an animal which in Jacob's case had shrunk, or whether it was imaginary, no doubt the striking and mysterious narrative which describes it points to an entire moral change which suddenly came over the Patriarch; and if looked upon in this sense, it is full of interest and instruction. For such events and changes occur to ourselves, and in some shape, suddenly or gradually, must take place ere we can be said to have gathered the object of our being here, or any benefit from that

being. Often they occur suddenly, and are the conclusion and summing up or rapid survey of a long previous course of action, resulting in a change of life and character, or conversion, as it used to be called. Perhaps more frequently, however, they are the result of a long and gradually enlarging vision. In Jacob's case it was the former. Jacob had long been absent from his native land; he had left it under questionable and difficult circumstances; he had supplanted his elder brother in his birthright; and now he is on his return, with his wives and children, and all the substance he had gained in his foreign sojourn, and is again about to meet his brother, who, he hears, is approaching with four hundred armed men. He recalls their parting; he is not sure how he is to be welcomed; he goes out to meditate at nightfall, and in the dark "there wrestled with him a man"—or, according to Hosea, an angel—"until the breaking of the day."

What is the meaning of this? Probably in our way of viewing things, and in our mode of experience, something like this took place.

Jacob is here brought face to face with his fate; he is made to think—as we say, aroused, awakened. He could no longer live from hand to mouth; he must live in some larger way, in some higher manner—on principle, by faith, by a faith which would lift him above fear. But a faith in what? The future was dark, the past was not pleasant—broken, unmeaning, bad. The eternal stars were shining over his head; darkness, silence was around him. Then it appeared that somehow he was not alone; some one, some thing came to him; an angel wrestled with him—he with the angel, the angel with him—until the breaking of the day. Jacob demands the angel's name, and he desires to know his fate, the meaning of the struggle; but he gets no answer. How often has not the same happened to mankind—yea, to ourselves—and this not only at great crises of our lives, but at ever-recurring and certain epochs, such as a birthday or the beginning of a new year! We try to see before us; the future may behold us crowned with laurels or with dishonour. Is our beloved then alive? Is

it a wedding wreath or a widow's cap I see upon my child? How high has the winding-sheet mounted upon my own bosom? Columbus-like I climb the mast alone at night to see if there is any twinkle of light, any sign of shore. But all is dark; the angel is silent, and I wrestle on. I hear indeed the voices of the abyss, deep calling to deep, a relentless deep breaking upon an ever-crumbling shore, the wail of the sea-bird, the cry of the solitary curlew. 'Come, O thou traveller unknown by my side, who hast no name, who will neither speak nor let me go, whose name, if known, is written in too gigantic letters for me to read! O traveller, or watchman, or whatever thou art, What of the night? Is there no day?' But the angel answers not nor letteth go until the thigh of the wrestler is broken. Then it is that Jacob becomes Israel, or a Prince of God, and passes to the heavens.

Yes, it is the great question of life—What is our life?—the question which life is given to answer; until which be answered, life has no meaning for us; the question which

many, however, seem to pass through life without asking, in a dumb animal way, as sagacious beasts—yet not without asking, if not in articulate language, at least in their helpless eyes, or in their dry and hollow hearts. The demand is for God—for the meaning of life, the object of life, the cause of life, and its end.

It is true that many suppose that they have the answer by learning to repeat definite words and names. But this is not the way of the angel in our text. He gives no name. He says, '"Why askest thou my name?" What signifies a name? It is the *thing* which signifies. What I am, what you are, what life is, that is what I come to teach; that is what you have to learn. Go to, let us wrestle.' Again you cry, 'O traveller unknown, is there no end, no day-breaking?' 'None. No day can break until the work of the night is done.' That is the answer. You say, 'I would it were not so; I would it were done. Why hast thou made me thus? Why thus subject me to vanity? What

is thy name, O angel of darkness? What? I read it in all things; but the meanings are various. I see it in the stars, on the walls of Belshazzar's palace, on the tombs in the rocks, on the grass, in the flowers, in the sunshine, in the shade, in the vast ocean, in the twinkling rill, in the dove and also in the hawk, in the sleeping child and the curled-up snake beside it, in millions of animals passed away, in our everlasting death and life, and Yea and No. I am here—here for a day. But what art Thou, Thou who inhabitest eternity, and speakest not, whose magazines are full, whose treasures are vast, but who hast no name over their portal, none that we may know Thee by, or which can show whether Thou and they are good or whether Thou and they are evil. Thou seemest both. What is our hope? Have we any hope? Is our hope in Thee, in what Thou art? And what then is that?' These are solemn and pressing questions. What is the answer?

First, then, we may have hope in that we are here. Our hope is that, as we are able to ask these questions, and able to be anxious for their

answers, there *are* answers, and answers which when found will satisfy, yea, satisfy completely and eternally, the poor, anxious, and pathetic inquiry which we make. For it cannot be that we are better or greater than that from which the power of such questioning comes; and the questioning comes from the depth from which we ourselves come. But the answer does not lie on the surface. Kings and prophets and righteous men have sought and not found it. The wise and mighty have not found it; great poets and philosophers—Lucretius, Empedocles, and others equally great of old, and now among ourselves—have not found it. Yet St. Paul says it is not far from any one of us; that we live, and move, and have our being in (the midst of) it; that it is neither far up in the heavens above or in the deep beneath, but nigh us and in our hearts; that by the visible the invisible things may be seen—the eternal, that is, and the victorious. He blames us, indeed, for not so seeing. And assuredly, if the sight is satisfactory, we are to be pitied as well as blamed if we do not see. The teaching of our blessed

Lord is throughout in the same direction. He rebukes men for being able to discern the signs of the sky, and yet not able to discern the being and government of God. He rebukes them for demanding miracles, and not seeing God in the order of nature—that very order of which men now complain as being their reason for not finding God; there being no room for Him, they say. But Christ bids us look at it. Behold the sparrows, the lilies, the grass of the field, the humble things, the common things, and find—equally as in the great things—the solution of our question. The solution evidently is that all things are very good, the order of Providence sufficient, the nature of Providence plain; so that who hath eyes to see and ears to hear, if he will but use his eyes and ears, may see and hear it. It is so plain and so good, that He will not have it altered. He even apologises, as it were, at the raising of Lazarus:—"Because of the people that stand by I said it." Elsewhere he says, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth!" Was that order different to Him than to us? Were moun-

tains removed to give Him a smooth path—a calm and smiling existence? By no means; quite the opposite. He had worse things than we have; and did He not feel them? His sweat was as blood dropping to the ground; His death was on a cross. But he accepted the order. He did not rebel against it or reject it. He did not pray for those legions of angels he spoke of, or come down from the cross, or accept the gall, or take the previously offered crown. He did none of these things. Why? Because He felt that that which was ought to be, and that the will of the Father was right. We are not considering here the special aspect of Christ's atonement and vicarious suffering, but the facts of His life and what He did. The atonement or vicarious suffering, as being necessary in the Divine order, leaves the line of the facts just the same.

What do we learn from all this? That one event happeneth to all, and that the event, whatever it be, is to be accepted—accepted, it may be, with struggle, yet with patience, and in the faith that it is good. For all life is the

same. We are all in the struggle of life; and it *is* a struggle. We are all in the midst of the road of life, and on that road we come upon our dark hour or hours, and we are beset with an everlasting 'wherefore.' What is our answer? What is our guide? Blessed are we that in our case there is One—One who sooner relieves us from our struggle than it was possible for Jacob to be relieved. We come upon the figure of Christ—the historic figure, the recognised figure, the Christ of the Gospels and of the Church. We come upon this, and find help; we get light from His life, and from His mode of dealing with life. We accept His method; we accept, that is, the circumstances of life, whatever they are. With Him we rise up to the faith in a Father, in a Providence which is that of a Father, in an end which is to be the result of the present way, in an end which would not have been but for this way; and thus we get the meaning of life, which before we had not—a path and light coming out of the circumstances of life and of the struggle in the darkness. We begin to prevail. The angel does not as yet tell us

his name, but we begin to spell out the letters of it. There is a dawn in the east; the night is far spent—day is breaking. The night, we find, was a school, the struggle an alphabet, our dark times hard books and dictionaries, parts and particles, as it were the bits of a dissected map which is becoming whole. There is a sound of sense gathering out of the disjointed syllables; a world is gathering together out of fragments; the dry bones are beginning to look like life; a future we find coming out of the present, made by it, a future of which the present is the factor—a bright future, a wonderful world, a hymn of praise from the cries of the battle-field and the dying. The angel is beginning to be less dark; but he has not yet given his name. That last stage, however, comes at last, and we cry, "My Lord and my God!" We find him no dark angel, but a light one who has become dark, that we might by that very darkness be able to lay hold of him. The angel, the circumstances, the trials of life, we find are all part of one thing—that God has given them; that He, in short, has become of them;

that He Himself has done these things for us, has felt them for us and with us, and assumed them, that we from the steps of our own dead selves, and from Him dead for us, smitten for us, broken for us, cleft for us, should rise up, and flow together with Him and by Him and in Him, as one with Him, and so able to reign with Him, by what He reigns by, for ever.

The conclusion of the struggle with the angel, the revelation of the meaning of life, is the discovery that the struggle of life for life, and the resolution of things to good, is with the Author of Life; that He is causing and is Himself the cause of the struggle, and this simply because of what He is; that He is good, and, being good, is desirous of effecting our good, and that in the highest regions, viz., in our moral being; and that He does this as alone it can be done, by putting us through trials and experiences without which it could not be ours—trials and experiences which are to be and give the course and summing up of our life here. God reveals himself to us in Christ, and He says there is none other name given under heaven among

men whereby they can be saved but the name of Christ. And why? Because by this only they come to God as He is; by this only can they get the meaning of life. There only, and by the spirit which is there, can they overcome life—by recognising, that is, the love of God in Christ, and being filled with the same love; by apprehending that nothing can separate them from His love, who gave His Son (or Himself), that with this He will also freely give them all things. That which was in Him, entering by this door into them, makes them conquerors. The mind which was in Jesus becomes the mind which is in them. They rise up to the love of Christ by having the love of Christ, and in this spirit, and by its power, they overcome, as He did, and are set down on the same throne. They conquer by yielding, conquer by bearing about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus, and by dying as He did.

But some may ask, '*Can* God suffer? Can God sorrow?' Ask first if God be love. This all things teach us that He is — all things when seen in their end and object. But if so,

then suffering (in the way of sorrow) and sorrow are inevitable—viçarious, but no less real. He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who instructed the mind, shall He not know? He who gave the heart, shall He not feel? Can the Most High be lower than the things He made, or less in their high things? Nay, the Most High is greatest in all, and higher also in those things in which they are highest—in love and sympathy. He is the Author of our best things, and these are our best things, and no doubt greater and deeper in the Fountain than in the stream. What parent does not suffer with his children? What lover does not sorrow when the beloved fails? Perhaps one of the most solemn signs of our fallen state is that we do not see this. One of the most pathetic utterances of our Lord, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?" is caused by this. We *shall*, no doubt, know one day (it is written so) hereafter, that is, in heaven. What then will the result be? "In that day ye shall ask me nothing." When

you know what all things are, you shall be satisfied with whatever is.

But God in Christ, when He bids us love and bear each other's burdens, only lays before us the laws of His own nature; the laws of His own life and eternal felicity; and gives us burdens which are but benefits. When we are told to love the Lord with all our heart, the very demand discloses what He is; for the command of love is the desire for love, and the blessedness of it is in Himself. If the cross of the Lord did not show forth the life of the Lord, everywhere and always, and the eternal nature of God—doing in time what is needed by the creatures of time—far better were it for them never to have been born. But that is the fact, the Gospel and our hope, that He is and does so; that sacred countenance thus seen is the ever present state of the suffering Deity—ever suffering, ever to suffer, till sin and its sorrows are ended; ever healing by His suffering, a vicarious suffering and atonement, but none the less real, and one which makes the sufferer and the sinner (God and man)

one together, God blessed for ever, and man purified by the blessing. But while we sin, our sins are a real suffering unto God, and must be so until we apprehend that for which we are apprehended, and that is our sanctification. Our spirits are united with His who helpeth us towards this union, now and ever, with groanings which cannot be uttered. It is to bring a new man into the world. We must find out the things to do, and the things God will not do for us. We do everything at the peril of our lives. It is the life which is in peril in everything we do—the true life, the high life, the spiritual life. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. In both cases as he soweth.

The explanation of the struggle of the angel with Jacob is that we are apprehended by God for a purpose—a purpose for which we were born; and that until *we* apprehend that it is so, and lay hold of it, life as yet has not had its meaning for us; that we are to apprehend this, and that until we do so God will not let us go, but will

struggle with us and teach us, even to the destruction of the flesh; and that the learning consists in finding it to be God who is giving us our lessons, and that, as He gives them for a good purpose, they themselves are good. Blessed are we when the revelation is made to us. To some it is not until after a long probation, to others it seems to come early; and all through life it comes and goes with all. Providence at times seems hidden from us all, and Christ at times seems gone away from us; yet, as to the Magdalene, a word recalls Him, His own word "Mary," or the breaking of bread, or the "It is I, be not afraid." Then, while the creation loses none of its beauty, the sting is taken from its woes, the serpent's head is bruised. The son, breaking from tutors and governors, finds himself free, heir of all, and at perfect liberty as a son of God—yet led by law, seeking ever the will of the Father, knowing *that* as the highest good, because of what it is; shunning and fearing sin as the poison of the serpent, as that which can distort and disturb the fairest paradise, and which, if dallied with wantonly, may destroy.

So that, although the day is sure, we ever cry, "Watchman, what of the night?" While knowing the angel's nature as well as name, we yet desire to end the wrestling, remembering, however, that it must go on until all is perfected in us—that the small are as much as the great with God, and that it is as needful to be perfect in parts as in the whole, even as He is perfect in parts, to whom the woes and sin of a world small as ours were such as to engage Him with and for every one, the youngest and meanest of us on its surface, feeling and acting for the needs of such as much and completely as for the universe at large, as much, because of what He is, for us little ones, as for the millions, it may be, of perfect suns and stars which He rules.

Jacob said unto the angel, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name?" And He said, "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?" To Moses He said afterwards, "I am that I am;" and in Christ He bids us say:—"Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on

earth as it is in heaven." That is the meaning and end of the struggle—to teach us that; and when we have learnt that, then "beyond these voices there is Peace."

Man, a little light in the darkness of nature, is the only thing able to enter into the meaning of nature. Nature has a meaning, and this meaning can only be apprehended by its Author. In part, that meaning can be apprehended by man; so far he is therefore partaker with God, in His image, and walking in His steps. And this Divine mind we have given us abundantly in Christ. Nature as a whole is silent, dark, stupendous. It was the Spirit which fashioned it—Creator Spiritus. It is the Spirit which understands it. It is that which signifieth and giveth life; and so far as man understands, he has it—so far as he has it, he understands. So far as man understands, he has life, and is in intercourse and at one with the Spirit of the universe, at one with the Most High, its and his Creator, and Sustainer, and Governor. Behold how great a matter a little spirit is. As man recognises and comes to this, a great calm

enters into him; he has not only looked upon God and lived, but he comes to live by looking. Jacob has become Israel; the Sun has risen on Peniel; and if he halts upon his thigh, what is it when death has been swallowed up in victory, and the dark angel has become the angel of light—the light found to be the product of the darkness—and the hard ribs and skull of the destroyer are changed into the wings and blooming features of a messenger from heaven, and the traveller unknown into the one and eternal love and righteousness? Amen.

## II.

## THE REVEALER.

"To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—PHILIPPIANS i. 21.

OUTSIDE the gates of Rome, three miles down the Tiber, is the church of the Great Apostle of the Gentiles; where he still speaks to the Romans from beyond the walls. Some fond hand has put above his tomb his own words, "Vas Electionis," and below it "Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum." Outside, Paul—Within, Peter! Peter, who probably was never in Rome at all, who, by its silence respecting him, the Epistle to the Romans implies had not been there before, and was not there when it was written, and who could scarcely have been there after! Peter, who perhaps never would have been thought of as connected with the place, had not the "super

hanc petram" required his presence! All modern research points more and more, with regard to the Apostle of the circumcision, that it is the Euphrates and not the Tiber by which he sleeps, and that the whole superstructure of the great Mediæval Church is built on a false foundation. To us, however, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God" has come through the Apostle who dwelt two years at Rome in his own hired house, and who now lies beside its stream, thence still speaking to us to-day, as for eighteen hundred years he has spoken :—

"Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum."

I remember one night sitting with the Father Hyacinthe in Rome, in the midst of his troubles, at a time when there seemed to him an end of all perfection, and his heart failed and flesh fainted. But when one said, "Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum," he exclaimed with joy, "Yes, it is enough—it is all." And now he too—the beloved brother Hyacinthe—is outside the gates of Rome.

For eighteen hundred years that voice has issued from that tomb saying the same words.

And how great has been the effect! How many sons and daughters of Adam have they not consoled and strengthened! Nay, have they not changed the face of Europe? Eighteen hundred years is long in human history; but in the history of the earth it is but a day: yet in that day how much has been accomplished! When these words were uttered, our Britain was inhabited by painted savages; the Cæsars reigned on the Palatine, the Ptolemies in Egypt; the East had still a great king; Jupiter and the gods dwelt on Olympus; bloody sacrifices were offered daily in Jerusalem; Mahomet was unborn, the Pope unheard of. But who now reigns? "Who cries 'vive l'Empereur!' to me or Hannibal now," said the first Napoleon, "though all cried so when we crossed the Alps? A Jew is king—who died as a malefactor."

In St. Paul's time, however, Christ was not yet recognised as king; and he was himself brought before kings as a malefactor for the namesake of the future King. Doubtless he foresaw, even when he suffered, the future glory and the reign of Christ, far more than we have even yet seen;

for he said, "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow." But though he knew that all was contained in that name, as the acorn holds the oak, it was but in part understood even by him at that time. For he had to learn by degrees what was meant by Christ, what His life and death contained, and was still learning this up to the last, passing from one degree of strength to another, to apprehend that for which he was apprehended; and his last as his constant prayer was, "that I may know Him."

So it must be with us all. The mere name is no "Open Sesame," which removes mountains with its sound. It is in that which it means and signifies, that its virtue lies. And just as we realise that meaning and signification, so is the virtue; for salvation is not the child of ignorance, but of knowledge, and we are saved by that which we know, not by that which we know not. The keys of heaven are in the hands of Christ, and He transfers them to ours, as by Him we come to see what Heaven means. We may know Christ after the flesh, as St. Paul had once known Him—known and persecuted Him

—as many know Him in whose streets He has taught; but this is not to know Him. To liken little things to great, and to make clear what we mean—it is as if in a lower region one who had not read his works had seen Shakespeare in the streets. In the higher and more awful world, Christ is not known until what He reveals is known.

St. Paul earnestly sought to know it. He had been called to the search on the way to Damascus. Probably he had even before had some misgivings of his ignorance, when he found himself persecuting that "just One." For Saul the persecutor had evidently a high sense of righteousness. But after the Divine call the truth came on him with such power that he gave his whole mind and time to the apprehension of Christ—what He was and what He meant. He counted all things but loss which did not lead to it. His life, he at last came to know, was hid with Christ in God; to him to live was Christ. Christ was the cause of his life, his new life; and Christ's life was that by which he lived. Christ came to him as the reve-

lation of such riches, that if by possibility it could be shown to be a dream, "then," says he, "we are of all men most miserable." He found in Christ the solution of the mysteries of life and of nature; the ocean to the river of his thoughts, the source from which they came, the end to which they went; the secret of the universe, the explanation of his own life; the opening of the future, and the place of all he loved. It gave him the keys both of Heaven and hell. It opened Heaven, and shut hell, by giving him a Heaven which, if at times far off, was ever sure in the bosom of the Father, and which shut up hell by exhausting it of its darkness, giving it a meaning and power, by showing that it is not endless, but the way to righteousness. "Who," says he, "shall separate us from the love of Christ?" *i.e.*, from the love of God, as seen and pledged in Christ, in having whom and which we have and must have all other and lesser things, to be revealed in their due season. We are to live, as Paul lived, in the belief and vision of this, ever seeking to apprehend that for which we are apprehended,

in the land of the living being saved by hope —a hope which leads to that perfect day, the pledge and model of which we have already in Christ.

As he went on, revelation increased upon St. Paul; other worlds dawned upon him within and without; he no longer found it difficult to realise the presence of God in the world, for he found all the earth full of His glory, the inner world calling to the outer, deep to deep, until the very waves and billows which had gone over him were turned into mountains of light and life. Forgetting that which was behind, he ever stretched forward, without fear or trembling, to that which was before. Knowing the Lord, he was not afraid of evil tidings. And now he found that what had once been his fear became his comfort. The saying, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you"—the arbitrary power, as it once seemed to him, exercised on the part of God, which had been his fear—became his consolation as he knew God in Christ. If Christ be God, he felt, He may well be left to arrange times and seasons as He pleases, seeing

He is ever acting in accordance with His own character.

Throwing himself into this, St. Paul says, "To me to live is Christ." I live for that for which Christ lived, I die to that to which Christ died; I live by that by which Christ lived; I am saved by the same hope, by the same fear. "Thou art my portion, O Lord;" Thy will, my will; a will and portion, which I accept because of what Thou art. And who has not felt, from past experience, how much better it would have been for him if he had ever taken God's will, his own heart telling him that the will of God must be good towards His creatures and the most blessed choice in itself—to be loved for its own sake, and chosen for what it is? Do we not know that if we had heartily accepted that will in earnest, we should be very different from what we are to-day? As we follow, as the mind is in us which was in Christ Jesus, do we not know that we enter into joy of the Lord, the rest of Christ, and the victory of Christ? Walking in the same path, in our measure—alas, how small by reason of our own short-

comings—we are set down with Him on His throne even as He is set down with the Father on His throne—the same Father, the same throne —the same path and end—the way of the Father and the Son—one Spirit, the all in all—Christ the first-born among many brethren in the house of one Father—one house of many mansions. In Christ the Spirit descends on man to lift him up to Heaven, the manhood is taken into God, man is united to God by the one Spirit, which proceedeth from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Father. So made one, Christ is not ashamed to call men His brethren.

Christ, the great Revealer, makes known to us the mystery of the Father and the Son. He came to show us the way to the Father. And as He lived by the Father, so are we to live by Christ. Christ is our bread, as the Father was the bread of Christ. St. Paul lived by it; wherefore he says, "To me to live is Christ."

Blessed Paul! but no less blessed we; for the bread is ours, and Christ remains for ever. God liveth ever; and man lives by that which pro-

ceedeth from His mouth. His word or will is ever going forth; and so far as we accept that will, which is given us momentarily in the daily circumstances of life, and live by it, we are living by the same bread and have the same life as Paul, yea, as Christ Himself. Our life with God in Christ brings us into direct contact with the living God by the circumstances of life which He is giving us, and by which we can reach to Him who is thus ever accessible. Christ gives us the key to the true attitude of every son of man.

Travelling through the sunny vineyards of the South, the crucified figure may look out of place among the smiling peasants and laughing girls. But life, on the whole, is, we feel, represented by that figure; death ends all, illness accompanies life, friends are taken out of sight. The figure of a sympathizing and suffering God comes to be the great explanation and cure. In Christ this is before us.

St. Paul took Christ as his companion for the way; and this companionship, while it made him keep on the way, never taught him to shun

anything on the road, or to leave the world and seek to save himself as a recluse or monk. He remained in the world, and was kept from its snares and lower life, by being lifted up into a heavenly region, where all the world's waves and billows, as well as its seductions, were unfelt or overcome by the blood of the Lamb, in whose steps he trode. No doubt it severed him from the ordinary current of the world. All who walk with Christ are separate from the lower life. But Paul did not put human life out of sight because of a better life beyond. He put the lower life by, but not life itself. He put it by here for a better here and now. Christ, and God through Christ, were as fully with Paul here as they could be hereafter.

But why, then, does he say "to die is gain," and in another place "to depart, to be with Christ, is far better"? He did not wish to be saved out of the hands of Providence. It is the same Providence here as hereafter. Possibly when he wrote this, as when he also wrote that he expected to meet the Lord in the air, he did not know, as afterwards he knew, what the

fulness of Christ meant. That he expected, as we expect, a bodily Christ, is probable. But that this would give him a fuller revelation of God he could not think. Personal affection would no doubt have an influence, as it has with us all; but yet this could not be his meaning; for a limited and visible personality could not be realised by all. A personal reign (as was dreamt of) at Jerusalem, or even in Heaven, with a visible body which must have limitation, will not supply the want. Something, perhaps, like that which is dreamt of by the Roman Catholics, where in their mass each possesses, or is supposed to possess, a whole Christ, so realised as that the individual seems to touch and handle the Divine nature, may be nearer to his meaning. But to be a partaker of the Divine nature infers a spiritual apprehension and communion—an apprehension of Divine things in a Divine Spirit. And no doubt this was what St. Paul meant; that he might know Christ as he was known by Him. "We shall see Him as He is," St. John says; which can only be by our being as He is, in the same

element and in the same Spirit. So only can we see him.

St. Paul saw Christ, and was lost in the heavenly vision. He desired to draw nearer, to die to all but it. He found Christ's seal upon the world, Yea and Amen for good upon it. He saw Christ rolling back the clouds of sin and sorrow from it, and keeping them down with His cross. He saw God in Christ; that He was good—light, and no darkness at all. He saw in Christ the way; and he took the way. To have the mind which was in Christ was his hope. All was lost if he found not, knew not, had not Christ. In Him he had all. In Him all was secure. Christ kept, nay, was the key of the kingdom. All the little feet of childhood, all the lost voices of sons and daughters, the touch of a vanished hand, the smile of a dying lip, he found laid up in Christ, treasured in the treasury of eternity, rolled back with Him on the returning leaves of the past. The music of Heaven raises the dead; the notes were written on earth, but played in heaven. The archangel's trump to him revived the world,

clearing it from its decay. "Behold He cometh with clouds." So it is ever. He only sees who has eyes to see. One day all eyes will be opened. St. Paul felt there was a day coming when the clouds would vanish. It was for that he longed.

The clouds often cover us. But we should hear God saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Overcome evil with good. Let the mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, and ye will overcome. It is only love which overcometh; which makes the world go round, which created and maintains it; and which, as we possess it, gives us all things. Enter then into the spirit of a son. You glorify your Father by this spirit. Glorify Him, then, and enjoy. St. Paul did this, and, finding the result, sought to bring all men to the knowledge and enjoyment of their blessings. Blessed Paul! blessed and blessing others. By this spirit it was that he overcame Nero, his lions and his sword, and is now overcoming the world. Thus was the amphitheatre overcome, and the coarseness and brutalities of the Middle Ages. Thus shall be overcome the luxuries and difficulties of our day;

and, by the knowledge and recognition of Christ, shall the world rise ever higher and higher to the perfect day.

"Our beloved brother Paul." It was St. Peter who called him so; Peter, whom he had rebuked at Antioch; Peter, called the Prince. Was he then the Prince? If, when so rebuked, he could reply, "beloved," we recognise the claim. But these two were one. If, where now he is, St. Peter could behold what has grown up on Tiber's banks in place of his fair Christ, the "Tu es Petrus" would strike chill upon his heart. The "mihi vivere Christus est" admits of no mistake.

## III.

## DESIGN.

"How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!"—PSALM cxxxix. 17.

THE Psalmist here speaks of the *thoughts* of God. We shrink, perhaps, from applying such language unto God. But we must use human expressions, and it is possible that in this one word we do more than use a mere similitude, and that thought is liker unto that which God really is, than any other of our descriptions of the Deity. We speak of the face, the mouth, the hands, and other aspects of God, all of which, of course, are mere human metaphors. It may, however, be different with the matter of thought. Thought is original, thought is creative; we think of a thing, and an act follows upon it. No act can take place without a previous thought. Act is the child of thought and the

evidence of thought; whatever is done or is created, is the work and proof of a foregone thought. The acts of God possibly lie under the same conditions; same in regard to any interval of time; the acts of God, that is, are preceded by thoughts, as are our own. At all events, we, following the Psalmist, can do no wrong when we think or speak of the *thoughts* of God.

What, then, are the *thoughts* of God? We may gather them from His acts and from His works of creation and providence, and, above all, from the manifestation of them in Christ.

In nature, the heavens declare the glory of God and are the expression of His mind—His foregone thoughts. When, after much search and the discovery of former errors, the great astronomer Kepler found the true path of the heavenly bodies, he cried, "Now I am treading in the steps of God." He had come upon His thoughts. The laws of nature and the objects of these laws are results of the thoughts of God.

I myself am the product of His thought. I could not have been had He not thought of me, wished for me, conceived me. I am His offspring,

the product of His thought of wisdom; I am His son; and I have in me multitudinous proofs of His paternal and incessant care and provision. When I violate a law of my well-being, I hear within me His voice saying, "Why will ye die?" When I violate a law of the well-being of others, the same voice resumes, "Ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?" All the elevation I have—all which goes beyond the margin of sight and time—all which is beyond the light of setting suns—the power I have of imagining a better world—that by which I know what I ought to be—I have from God. They are radiances of the eternal light, coming to me from a better and higher than myself; signs of that which He is, and I ought to be and shall be; proofs of what He is, and what He had in view in my creation, and what were His thoughts for me. "How precious are they!"

Therefore it is the Psalmist, when he says in another place, "I have seen an end of all perfection"—when man fails him, and he sees none righteous, and feels himself not to be so—is able to add, "But Thy commandment is ex-

ceeding broad." That is to say, I feel that there is a right that is somewhere; I know what it is, and that it should be, and shall be. When the spectacle of this evil world appals me, the consideration of what is right, what the eternal laws are, and what the Lawgiver is and must be, consoles me, and I am lifted up and set at rest by getting on this Rock which is higher than I, higher than that in which I am highest—higher than I, higher than any other body or thing here below—the high, eternal, righteous God; righteous because eternal, eternal because righteous, righteous because love.

I take the first commandment—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind." Does any one keep it? Does the world reflect it? Is it possible to keep it? Does it not seem a hard obligation? But let us look at the meaning of it. What is its cause? Does Deity gain by our observation of it? Does He stand in need of its performance, or even of our existence? Is He obliged by our assistance? Was He obliged to create us? We must answer all these queries in the negative. What, then,

is its cause? It is a demand for love. But what is a demand *for* love, but the demand *of* love? Let us look at it in this light — no doubt the true and only just light—and its difficulties and burden of obligation vanish away. We find it brings us into, because it reveals, the very heart of God. And so with all the commandments, although with none so much as this; for this not only brings us face to face with God, but brings us to Him one by one, as if there were no others but God and ourselves in the world, and He were asking us individually for our own and personal love. This is a fact, and the reality of our being and its end—the object of the thoughts of God concerning us. Surely we may say, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!"

And let none be put from the acceptance of this truth by considerations of the vastness of the universe, and the impossibility that God, occupied with such great and multiplied objects as He there must be, can condescend to or be capable of occupation with so small and vanishing a point as a man or men, or even this world

altogether. For, observe, that which God is, He is and must be everywhere and always, perfect and the same at the smallest point and in the shortest time, as in the vastest space and throughout the ages of eternity. The microscope reveals the same perfection as the telescope. My little heart, my little day, is no less precious to God—perhaps it may be more so—than the greatest bulk of suns, and the roll of the eternal heavens. Is not a heart which can look into my heart, and know what love means, more to me also than the vastest irresponsive, unconscious seas and mountains? And then it is true that He made me; and He made me because He *wanted* me. He had a desire for me—for my love. He thought of me before I thought of Him. This is His grace, His electing love. I am His choice. I rest on the thought of this—that I came from Him, that I am His. My being I owe to Him. I am precious to Him. The thought of this is precious to me. But if I owe my being to Him, and it is precious to Him, so must my *well-being* be. I am ever in His hands; He must ever, therefore,

be providing for my welfare; and He changes not. Change in me does not produce change in Him. Can anything then separate me from Him? My sins? Yes, sin will separate, does separate. But what is sin? Is it not the sign and consequence of a previous separation? Let me but keep close to God, and I shall not sin. I love God. So long as I abide in this, as long as this seed remaineth in me, and I remember that I am born of God, I shall cease from sin. It is the forgetfulness or outrage of this which causes and is sin. Sin separates; that is its punishment. Separation leads to sin; that is its origin. It is flux and reflux, the repetition of cause and effect. But ever the same throughout all remains the being and nature of God. That this does not change, and that He is acting ever in accordance with it for our well-being as there is need, is my hope and confidence. I trust not to what is in myself; I trust to that which is in Him. Sin requires punishment to cure it. It is aberration; it cures itself. But I help on that cure when I remember what God is, and what I am to Him. I remember His love,

His purity, His righteousness. I give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness; I rejoice at it, I rejoice in it. In this I have a pledge of my own holiness, that He will not leave my soul in sin, but will with every sin give its due crop, until I learn that it is an evil and bitter thing, and know that my Father has a better and the best thing in store for me when He desires and commands my departure from sin.

By storm, by sunshine, by losses and crosses, He teaches me as I have need; and the teaching is ever going on. I may not be aware of it, I may forget it; but there it is. Men shall be and are all taught of God, although they seem unconscious who is teaching. But He is teaching all, and always—sometimes by His silence, sometimes by His storm. Yet it is we ourselves who make the storm; the Everlasting is ever still. We run against the bosses of His buckler, and fall down. We stop our horses in the midst of their noisy pace, and are ashamed of the noise we have made in the eternal silence around. Yes, He abideth, and abideth ever the same; teaching, and going on to teach; judging

that He may teach, not teaching that He may judge. At great emergencies we recognise His touch. Should we not also recognise it in ordinary things? Should we not see the face of the Father in the working of the eternal laws as well as when they seem to be suspended?

Too often we shut out the greater by the less, the light of eternity by that of time, the sunshine by closing our shutters and lighting a lamp. But it cannot last. The sun streams into the ball-room when the morning comes—a little ray at first; but by-and-by all other lights wax dim, and the dancers go home ashamed.

Men's faces reflect not the Divine light, but the broken and discoloured lights of common artifice. The sweet voices of nature and the calls of early dawn are not heard because of the noise of the artificial music. Night comes on—and then another thing is revealed, that the sun himself shut out more than he showed. With the descent of that one glaring orb, a thousand worlds shine forth—worlds which his garish beams had hidden. Even so our lives hide what

death will reveal, and our vulgar life what the Divine would make manifest.

Many pass through life and die old, who seem never to have heard the constant call of God, "My son, give me thine heart." They see not the light of the heavens nor hear the eternal chime for the fires and noises of earth.

The thoughts of God are necessarily good towards us; for they are determined by what He Himself is. He made man in His own image; He had no less a thought for him than that: that he should be a partaker of the Divine nature. And as no nature akin to the Divine can be blessed in any other way than that in which the Divine itself is blessed, His light is to be our light. In God's light we are to see light. He bids us enter into the joy of the Lord; and that His joys may be our joys there is but one course—for there is but one such nature—a moral, benevolent, righteous course, triumphing by good and righteousness. That the will of the Father may be done on earth as it is in Heaven, as it is by the Father and the sons of God—who are the sons of God by doing His will

—this should be our prayer and endeavour, as it is both God's will and our own blessedness. That our will should be brought into accordance with His, and run in the same channels, to have the same end, this is to lay hold of eternal life; and that we should lay hold of it was God's will when He created us, His thought for us ere He made us. How blessed that thought, how high that intention, we shall know just as we fulfil it and become partakers of it. Partakers of the Divine nature! A thought impossible save to those who are partakers; but such know that no other thought was possible. "Oh, the depth of the riches!" And such also know why and how it is that when they go astray the Shepherd goes to seek the sheep, to gather and find the lost even at the expense of His own suffering.

Does this take aught from the merit of the work? Where love is, there is no question of merit, but of salvation; no other word but "My son who was dead is alive again; he was lost, and is found." All are dead and lost who are not alive unto God, and having their rest in the arms of the Father everlasting.

The paths which God has prepared for us to walk in are paths of pleasantness and peace. They greatly err who suppose that by any other way either peace or pleasantness are possible. But, alas! it is too often necessary that through much tribulation men shall enter into the kingdom of God. For if we cease from the ways of God, we lose the meaning of our lives. They become disjointed, purposeless, and dark; and the end is death. With the way the prospect grows clearer and nearer, and the end, everlasting life, is laid hold of even here. Do we not feel it so, and that the lives we lead, as we add them up, and as they are led, are bringing us nearer and nearer to a perfect day, or removing us farther from it, just as we follow or not the leading of God? Does the light grow more dim? Is it not because we are taking our own thoughts in place of the thoughts of God, reversing and bringing to none effect the purposes He had for us—making lines of our own which lead to nothing, instead of taking His which lead to all things? Are we without the consciousness of God's presence, as if there were no God in the

world? Is it not because, by quitting the path of purity and holiness which His will had chalked out for us, we have disturbed the element wherein He is to be found? We often seem to live in darkness and uncertainty, as if there were no God, because we go not back to the Eternal Cause, which is ever at the root of all, and which is ever touched, as it is ever present, when we fall back on the moral element within our hearts.

We too often find no personal God because we are gone out of the element where He can be found—where only a personal response is possible. "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked," cried "a certain woman" to Jesus. "Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to see Thee," said others. But to the one He says, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it;" and to the other, "Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother." What meaneth this? Surely that whoso doeth the will of God is present with God, and that all such are brethren.

Christ tells us where to find and how to find a personal God—that He is to be found in the doing of His will; that that will gives us the presence of God Himself; that wherever the thoughts of God are, He is; and His will is, in our heart. "My meat," saith Jesus, "is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." In this He found the Father, and lived by the Father. It is, or may be, the same with us.

And what a thought of the Father is Christ!

That the Godhead should become man, that the manhood might become God! The Father first makes man in the image of God, and then God in the image of man. He makes the Godhead into man, that He may take the manhood into God. What a thought is the incarnation! The putting of the Godhead into man, that man might see, and touch, and handle the eternal life! For this life was present in Christ, and was manifested unto us. The Word became flesh; and as our words declare our invisible thoughts, so the Word revealed the invisible Father, and manifested the life that we might have fellow-

ship with it—"fellowship" by having "an understanding" of Him that is true, and, by understanding, sympathy and loving adoration.

And what a life was that which was manifested! The life of Love—Love bearing our burdens and carrying our sorrows—Love, the bearer of burdens, to whom there is no object but the welfare of the beloved. There have been gods many and lords many, dreamt of, realised, enthroned; men who made themselves gods by heroism and climbing of Olympus; but none before who showed himself God by coming down. Incarnations, avatars; but no incarnation or avatar which was that of righteousness and the sacrifice of self. Yet it is this incarnation which is winning the day; it is a dead man who wins the field, brought to life again, and enthroned in every human heart which apprehends Him, who here, and in Heaven also, has become the centre of adoration, and the burden of the triumphal song. To Him that was slain, and that washed us from our sins in His own blood, be ascribed all honour and glory, dominion and power! Worthy

is the Lamb! Yea, at the name of Jesus every knee is bowing, or shall bow, in willing adoration. Christ shall be elected by universal suffrage as King over all, because of what He is. Elected King to the glory of the Father! Glory to the Father because of what He must be to call forth such a sacrifice; and to the Son, because of what He did! The Father is glorified in the Son; in that Son is the Father continually well pleased; His going forth to the redemption of others in glorious sacrifice is well pleasing unto God. Such a Son is ever in the bosom of the Father, and ever there is ever revealing the thoughts of God to us. Such as the Father is, such is the Son; their spirit one and indivisible. Overcoming evil with good, He invites us to the same victory by the same path—a path which gives us rest at once, the moment we are on it; a secret which they who find know how much it opens, a method by which (and by which alone) we climb to the stars. It may seem often a hard path, but it is not so in truth; the peace of God is on and in it. It is always in our power. Taking the will of God as seen in Christ

and felt within our hearts, wherever it may seem to lead us, in itself it gives and is victory and rest. It may take us to the fires of martyrdom, and to others we seem to perish, but we are at rest. We say it is not painful. Heaven and earth may come together, but we know that it is a revelation of the righteous judgment of God that not a hair of our heads shall perish. Our rest is in the Lord, in what He is, in what He intends for us; and the manner of the love which is in His thought for us is that we should be "sons." Can anything go higher than this? Can any rest be more perfect than that which is based upon the fact of it? Let us then ever believe that in accordance with this fact our lives are now being led, our paths marked out, and that nothing can sever us from this, nothing interfere with it, but our own forgetfulness, or distrust, or violation of its conditions. Let us rejoice to think that God is ever with us, that we may and should confide, convey, entrust all our ways, and hopes, and desires to Him, believing that what we cannot He will, that what we do not He does, that space, distance, time, hinder not, and

cannot hinder, His accomplishments. Let us confide and commit all our thoughts and desires to Him whose thoughts and desires have created and brought us to this place and time, and have given all the relationships and possessions we enjoy. Then shall we not fear, then shall we not despair. Even if all we love seems to have gone into the depths of the sea, let us put our thoughts beside His thoughts, and then we shall never be heartbroken.

"I had a message to send her,
To her whom my soul loved best;
But I had my task to finish,
And she had gone to rest."

Rest in the Lord, and give others to Him in trust, and He will deliver our message, and see that our wishes are accomplished, yea, beyond our powers and thoughts. His originating thought gave birth to ourselves, and therefore to all that is in us of love and righteousness; and His thoughts, for us and ours, are better and higher than our thoughts. Amen.

## IV.

## PROGRESS.

"He must increase."—ST. JOHN iii. 30.

ALL Christian-minded men, we cannot but think, will have observed that at present the Christian world is passing through a great series of transformations. And although most men are disposed to regard their own times as exceptional, still I think that we must regard our own as really remarkable beyond the average.

Every man, perhaps, as he goes through life, consciously or unconsciously himself passes through somewhat of the same transitions; but even the same transitions are more observable when they take place without him, and on a large scale. The changes which are at work in our time, however, I believe are not merely changes of degree, but changes in kind which

will radically affect the Christian world. I believe that they are changes for the better.

Christ is the Heir of all the ages; but there is much of His inheritance which as yet He has not taken up—which is His in the sense of property, and His in the sense of production, but with which at present He would seem to have little or no connection.

This arises from our past too limited apprehension of Christ. Christ has been too imperfectly apprehended even by the earliest ages; and indeed this was inevitable from its being needful to have the light of the future to reveal what He truly was in the past. The ages are unrolling themselves. Christ is the key-note and comptroller, but as yet He has not been sufficiently recognised as such. Yet all are on their way to this recognition; and when that which is perfect is come, and the parts are made into a whole, we shall see that the body is of Christ, a body created by His Spirit.

As yet Christ has been but partially understood. "The Heir of all the ages" has been kept under bondage, retained, as by the Church of

Rome, in His mother's arms, and by too many among ourselves under the lock and key of "confession," a dead Christ who is risen and is not here. But He cannot be so confined; the Word cannot be so bound; "He must increase;" and He will increase. It is His increase at present which is shaking the Churches, and causing old things to pass away.

Old creeds are questioned, discussed, discarded, because they give no sufficient answers to the questions of the day. Men embark upon an unknown sea; and while we hear many cry, "Watchman, what of the night?" we hear few reply that "All is well."

Yet, all is well. And they who know Christ, what He is and what Christ means, and know *in consequence* that He is, know that all *is* well. Anchored in this sure ground, they do not mind the swing of the vessel in the darkness, or that the well-known stars have changed their positions, and that those which were before are now behind, and that those which were behind are now before them. But it is not so with all. It is not so with those who have but a traditional

and external knowledge of Christ. Thinking that with the swinging of the vessel all is lost, all their energies are directed to get her back to her old position, and the stars as they were before. And who shall blame them? For those alone are at peace who know that it is not the external signs which make the security, but the security which makes the signs, and that it is that which God is that is our safety. What He is they know both from Christ and from the nature of things, of which everywhere and always the key and seal and body to us now is Christ.

Not seeing this, however, many are now wildly betaking themselves to declarations of majorities, to the creation of infallible mouth-pieces, to a tyrannical conservatism and blind fury, to secure the symbols and make sure of that of which otherwise they feel that they have no sure possession. But this is madness and folly, if not worse. If the thing itself be sought to which the signs point, it is well. That they point to good, that they indicate where truth lies, the truth we need, we do not doubt, so far as most of the old names and confessions

are concerned; but by themselves they are nothing. And it would appear that much of the present breaking up is the work of the providence of God to show and teach us that it is so, that in themselves the signs, the mere *words*, are nothing; nothing but as they give and are found to give that which we need and they at first described. It may be that they were insufficient for our present and future state; and it is probable that additions will have to be made. The world has enlarged, the heavens expanded, and the apprehension of Christ must be enlarged to meet these also. He must increase. And thank God He is increasing. There is a growing Christ, and a growing apprehension of Christ amongst us.

But as yet this is not clearly seen. His new aspects are not fully realised. That new thing which is amongst us is not yet realised as being Christ. Ere this be done it is possible that we have to go back to very elementary matters. The new aspects of nature are not explained by the past definitions of Christ by the Churches. And the attempts made by

some, as lately by the Church of Rome, have made matters worse. Yet Christ is God, and the worlds are God's; one and the same mind and plan pervade both. It is not as yet seen, however, so to be, and therefore a work and struggle is before us, a time of darkness and of battle, ere we can harmonize and explain the one by the other. It is the struggle in the dark of Jacob with the angel—the angel without the name; the struggle which breaks the thigh ere the light comes and the morning dawns on the sons of God. As with Mary at the sepulchre, Christ will be taken for the gardener; or, as with the apostles in the boat, for a spirit; or, with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, for a traveller, ere He is truly known. He will not at once be known under unaccustomed forms. It will take time ere the true end comes, and Christ again be really recognised.

Nay, already so far has been the relapse into darkness, that men go asking for God as if His existence were an open question. Christ is forgotten, having not been truly realised. Creeds

are questioned, and when they do not afford the answer wanted, men go forth to seek for the answer in the dark. They said before, "I believe in God." But now they ask, "What is God?" They go to find the answer where they can. The old Confessions and Church discourses, they say, are no answer to present needs. The best cry, "O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down!" It seems to be felt by all such that God must *do* something to make Himself known. Let us look at this. What is possible in this respect? The first thing men should make clear to themselves in such an inquiry as this is, What can God do to make Himself known? What would make His being and nature plain? What sort of proof is it men expect?

First of all, they must remember that God is a Spirit; that if He be at all, He is of a spiritual nature; and that it is, therefore, in this region that the proof of His being, and of what that is, must be sought. To be, He must be a Spirit; He cannot have form, boundaries, portions, or sensible conditions. He cannot be

seen or touched, He can only be spiritually made manifest, that is, made manifest to the spirit. A miracle, in the sense in which it used to be quoted, would neither give us God in the way now demanded, nor, indeed, in any true way, save in so far as its moral aspects were concerned; nor is it the proof modern inquirers seek. When miracles were exhibited, as detailed in the Holy Scriptures, they did not apparently produce belief as a rule, nor impress those who saw them with the conviction that it was God men were beholding. And if not then, how much less now, when the powers and aspects of nature have been so developed amongst us, and when what are called spiritualistic manifestations —whether true or false it is all the same—have opened up conditions which, while beyond our explanation, even if taken for granted, give us no conviction of the presence or nature of God. Those who wrought miracles in the apostolic times themselves did not rest on them as doing much or anything towards a revelation of God. Our blessed Lord Himself—and it is very remarkable—in the great and crowning miracle of

the resurrection of Lazarus, sets aside any such value in them, when He says, as if in deprecation to the Father, "Because of the people which stood by I said it." What He and the apostles appeal to—and therefore the true proof and manifestation of God—is the evidence of design in the order of nature, the benevolence, harmony, and beauty of its operations.

But it is this very order of nature which has become the stone of stumbling in our day. Its eternal order, we are told, leaves no room for God. Things follow by sequence, one thing leading to and producing another. Sequence, evolution, natural selection, do all without the intervention of any third party. Necessity requires and effects it. But necessity for what? And what is necessity? Do such things explain and exhaust the whole question? Let us take an example. Suppose three eggs hatched before us by artificial incubation—those of a partridge, a lark, and a parrot. They are little lumps of yellow and white albumen, differing apparently in nothing, save, it may be, in some faint matters of proportion, and this undiscernible either by

analysis or the microscope. One breaks its shell, and runs off immediately to the stubble; another, after an interval, rises singing into the clouds; another, ere long, will stretch out a claw to you, know you, and all but speak. Is all explained or exhausted when we say they do what they do by tradition, inherited experience, selection? Is the different life laid up and existing in each different shell accounted for by these explanations? We cannot think so; for let us go a little farther. We get the body, no doubt, out of the shell; but what then? Is that all? By no means. The body is endowed with, or gives forth, life. So far this is explicable; the life is (let us say) the product of the body. It is given out by it; it is its child. But let us observe still farther. At first it is the child of and subject to the body, and is, no doubt, always in a certain sense dependent on it. But what then? By-and-by the life becomes the master and lord of the body. It turns round upon the body and makes it its servant. It uses it as an apparatus to perform its requirements; it is no longer second, it is first. The object of the

body, then, was this life. But, still farther, the life itself has an object, the happiness of this creature. The creature itself had its being for a purpose which evinces a source beyond itself; a source, too, which (from the object of the creature's existence being happiness) we find to be a moral and beneficent source, beyond and distinct from and anterior to the creature itself; and if a moral, then a personal source—personal and one, for there can be but one such. Now if this be so, "the order of nature" is not only no hindrance or disproof, but the proof of and clue to the being and nature of God; the invisible being made known by the visible.

We find, from the purpose of the being of the creature, a moral and personal origin, and one beyond itself; a good origin, to which we come, and of which we are convinced by its substance existing within ourselves.

By the highest within ourselves we touch a Most High without, and are assured both of its being and nature—the power and nature, that is, of an "Eternal Godhead." But although this proof is strong within ourselves, and becomes more so

the more it is dwelt upon, it is manifest that it cannot be made plain to those beyond ourselves, and that every one must see it with his own eyes —eyes, however, which every one has wherewith to see. But God is not seen by His doing something; for there is nothing that He can do, nothing which would not rather hinder than help any true apprehension of Him; and no such mode of manifestation or proof is possible for a spiritual being. There is no other mode possible than that which is ever before us. It is no doubt a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the eagle's eye hath not seen. But then for those who are more than they it is a sure highway, and one which, the farther trodden, leads onward to the greater fulness. It is the way of the Spirit, the path of purity and holiness, without which we cannot, but by which we do, see the Lord; an open secret to those who find it, yet not transferable when found.

But we speak of the Godhead as manifest in Christ. What do we mean by this? We mean that the life of Christ shows what the Godhead

is. We come to Christ by the best things within ourselves, by that which is within recognising that which is without, and setting to its seal that this is God. Christ comes to us, and says, "I am He whom ye seek;" and the heart responds, "My Lord and my God."

"As yet we see not all things put under Him;" and the stray atoms at present seem whirling hither and thither without centre or attraction; but by-and-by they will settle into their place. It will be seen that, as that which is highest in us has a most high without, so that Most High is found in Christ, whom, if He be not by any other token seen to be God, or one with God, men will find to be God by the might of what He is, a might which we recognise as right. Christ will be recognised as the farther indication of that which nature is, and it will be seen that all the scattered roads and rays come from and lead to one place. Christ reveals the Godhead, and gives us to know that its essence is paternal and righteous love. By Him men come to God, and find Him Father. By Him they get the spirit of sons, and with the

spirit of sons a Father's house in ever active felicity and peace—the peace of God which comes from being ever in fellowship with Him, receiving the things which they know not and stand in awe of with reverent faith and the patience of hope, and that which is known and desirable with joy and thankfulness. Beautiful as the world is, they find it doubly beautiful if from a Father's hand; so far as it is dark and mysterious, they wait in confidence for the explanation. Knowing the love of Christ, and the love which gave Christ, they know that nothing can come between them and such love; knowing the love of Christ by its birth within themselves, they overcome by its own growth within them. Believing in the eternal love, and in "the primeval sympathy *which, having been, must ever be,*" they are saved by the belief in it. This belief now increases. This consciousness of the nature of God, this apprehension of the meaning of Revelation and of the being of Christ, increases in the world. There is a growing sense and recognition of the unity of nature and of Christ; of Christ rightly understood; that He is the key

to nature and pledge of its excellence, and the pledge and prophecy of final good. Seen in the light of Christ, men do not now look on the Jura Mountains merely as eight thousand feet of limestone, the shells of creatures which have passed away, but as pledges and proofs of a countless duration of past joy and happiness, of joy and happiness ever giving birth to higher and higher species of life and light. In this view, with this sign, they conquer—the sign and vision of the Godhead in Christ—an increasing vision and a sign ever growing more powerful, as it is coming to be understood. It is a sign which, with the inner experience that "whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it, and whosoever lose his life shall preserve it," is a perpetual and growing proof, not only that God is, but that marvellously and indescribably excellent, beyond what the eye can see or the ear hear, is the nature of the eternal Godhead—eternal by what it is, and, by what it is, God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.

## V.

## THE KINGDOM OF THE FATHER.

"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."—1 JOHN i. 5.

THE Apostle tells us that God is light, something, that is, which is manifest, and makes manifest. And we are in an age of light—of greater light than ever was before; the world is flooded with it. Man's intellect has called forth from the material world forms and forces unknown to our fathers and new to us, clothing the world with fresh and marvellous riches. The progress of our age in physical discovery is astonishing. The "wondrous wand" of science has raised man beyond all comparison with "the beasts that perish." We are in an outburst of terrestrial riches which it is hard to catalogue—riches which are but the parent, probably, of a progeny more vast and varied still to come.

Has the spiritual kept pace with the material increase? We believe it has. Every addition to the development of nature, every rise in physical discovery, has been an increase of light and diminution of darkness.

'But,' it will be asked, 'is this the light alluded to in our text, the light of God?' It is, and it is not. The light of God is in nature, but nature is not God; God may be seen there, yet that which we see is not God. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork;" "the invisible things of God are clearly seen by the things which are made;" but the things which are made are not their maker, and nature is not God. Indeed, so little is this the case that, looking on nature alone, the existence of God has been disputed, and His personality denied. Nor will the aid of science produce Him to our gaze. Yet God is there, and may be seen; and the glory of His personal light appears if it be properly looked for, and nature be rightly dealt with. But to this end God must be looked for where He is to be found, and with

an instrument fitted for the search. God is a Spirit; He must be sought for in the spirit, and seen by the spirit. Man has this instrument; he has this organ whereby he can discover God; he has the spiritual nature of which God is, and by which he can discover Him. He has this in virtue of being akin to God, of being formed in God's image; he has it not by his own exertions, or by the exertions of others; he has it as part of his inheritance as "God's offspring." He has "eyes and ears" whereby to see and to hear the light and voice of God. It is a gift co-extensive with humanity; all men have it. There is neither speech nor language where its voice is not heard; its sound is gone out into all the earth, and its words to the ends of the world. Created in the image of God, for the purpose of having direct personal intercourse with God, man necessarily has faculties suited for this intercourse, and the object of these faculties must ever be within his reach. It is true that a man may not use these faculties, may even live in ignorance of them, and so occupy him-

self with other things as to shut, as it were, these faculties out, and live unconscious of them until his dying day. But they are there, and sufficient for the purpose for which they were given; and he is miserable and culpable, or, as St. Paul says, "without excuse," if he does not use them.

But, beyond this, man sees the light of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that is, there has been a special revelation of God. Men's eyes saw, their hands handled, and their ears heard the light and voice of God; "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us;" and this life was the light of men. Christ came to make up that which was deficient in nature, to supply "that which by nature we cannot have," to lighten that which was dark. He is the complement of nature, and the supply of that which is wanting in it to every man.

But although infinitely higher, and intended for all, Christ's light is more limited than that of nature by the *conditions* of His coming. The light was confined to the personality of Christ, and to the cognizance of those who

saw and heard Him, or to that of such as hear of Him through their word; and these are fallible. Mercifully a Record has been given, dictated at the time by the Spirit in which He came, which conveys to us all that He did and said. But this is not always in its integrity before us. Its interpreters have often put their own meaning upon it, and not its meaning, and have reduced its dimensions to their own circumference; and this on things of the first importance, such as relate, for example, to the character of God. And beyond this, moved by the very sense of its importance, its guardians too often have so wrapped it up, for preservation, that its light has not been seen; or, again, have made its authenticity dependent on their authority, until indeed their instrumentality has been taken for that which it was intended but to convey.

Now let us look at the working of this.

Christ's disciples were to tell the world that all God's offspring were alike precious to the Father; they were to commission those who received this message to bring others to the

same belief, that by this all men might be saved. For men can only be saved by believing this. But instead of this many declared that those only were precious to the Father who adopted the Father; leaving it to be supposed that they changed God by their belief, instead of recognising that they were changed themselves by believing in His unchangeableness; in His being good, and unchangeable in His goodness; light, and having no darkness at all. For the world is made into the Church by men believing in the initiatory love of God; and they only are the Church who believe this. Sent to baptize men into the name of the Father because they were His sons, and into that Holy Spirit in which all are one, they baptized men into communities on terms of their own making, terms which were limitations of the Godhead, and which, in limiting God, divided men from one another, until the leaven which was to leaven the world and to make all men one, by abolishing the worldly distinctions of Jew and Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond, and free, nay (so high was it to reach in spiritual things)

even of male and female, became an additional divider of men, adding to instead of healing the divisions of humanity, so that we not only have worldly and natural distinctions, but religious also, Catholic, Protestant, Episcopalian, Independent, Baptist, Presbyterian, and many others. Nay, not only so, but it has come to pass that, instead of being as it was intended, and ought to be, a blessing to the nations and a help to all good government, and as it was when first kings became its nursing fathers, and queens its nursing mothers, from the help it gave to all good works and to national improvement, the Church became, in many nations, a hindrance instead of help; yea, so great a hindrance as to oblige some nations to spue her out of their mouths, and almost all to limit and to be on their guard against her, so great were the difficulties which she occasioned in many lands. All history is full of this. Alas! so greatly has the Church too often frustrated her Divine mission, as to increase the disease which she came to heal—the alienation, namely, of mankind from God, and from one

another. Is it not true even now that while we so-called Christians can meet to eat and to drink together, to legislate, to trade, for charities, for amusements, and for sports, we cannot unite for purposes of religion? that the only thing which we cannot do in common is to meet in one place to worship a common God and Saviour? Alas! while the light of nature and the still small voice remain, and strong as ever, the light of the Church is glimmering, and her voice is of stammering speech. May we not say as of old, "O my mountain in the field; thou who wast to be the healer of the nations, thyself needest healing; how solitary thou sittest who wert full of people, thou who wert to be the shepherdess of the nations: tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, whither art thou gone? where feedest thou that flock which thou hadst to pasture by still waters, and to rest in the shadow of a rock from the heats of noon?" It is asked on all hands, "When the Son of Man cometh, will He find faith on the earth?" And where is the Church? Was it for this that He became incarnate—became the

Son of Man—not of one man or tribe—but of man? Was it for this that all generations were to call his virgin mother blessed? Assuredly not. What, then, is its meaning? What is the cause of this decadence? HAVE the gates of hell prevailed? Surely there is something wrong, terribly and radically wrong, in our conceptions of the Church when thus it is—when the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint, and all complain of a disease common to all. But what is the disease? It is simple, it is deep seated, but not far to seek; yet we cannot get rid of it unless we retrace our steps to the beginning, unless we receive the kingdom of heaven again from above as little children. For the cause, although deep, is patent. The cause of the decadence of the Church is simply this, that she has too often set up her own kingdom instead of that of the Father. She has tried to establish that which cannot be established, and never ought to have been attempted to be established—another kingdom than that of the Father. She has tried to limit God, and to set up a kingdom on

these limitations, on denominations, that is, distinctions, definitions, instead of on that which is one and alone the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. She has baptized into her own name; and the names of particular churches have swallowed up the one Church, which is the kingdom of the Father.

And the faith of such churches fails, and faith in such churches. They are not of that light wherein there is no darkness at all; and when the Son of man cometh to such He comes as a man of sorrows, to remove their candlesticks out of their place. Many such have been removed, many branches of the seven-branched candlestick. And so faith fails throughout Christendom, and so now faith fails in many of its high places; grey hairs are on them, and they know it not. We are told that there is much infidelity; and no doubt there is.

There are two kinds of infidelity at present among us: that which sees not, and says it does not see; and that which sees not, but says it does. Of the first we have many pathetic speci-

mens in those men of science, men of thought, and men of suffering, who cry, "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down!" to whom the greatest boon would be to show them God—men who seek but cannot find, yet who, we believe, *would* find if they sought aright. And then there are those who say they see, but do not. These last are often keepers of revelation, and are they who refer us to general councils, clerical majorities, and an artificially created infallibility; men who think they see "the end of all perfection" when any flaw seems discovered in the mode whereby revelation has been transmitted. Alas! if we are to be dependent on some future general council to give us God, and are to believe in the meantime as it were *provisionally*, where would we be? and where the faith of the young and poor, the old and weak, those multitudes for whom Christ died, and on whom He had compassion? Do we not hear Him say of such, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes?" Nay, may we not

be sure that so it will ever seem good in His sight? Alas! that *any* who are light-bearers should so err, and send us far off to seek for an unknown God! Yet I blame not the clergy; they are the salt of the earth, the first who came out from their brethren to seek the Lord. That first love is not forgotten. Light so far was theirs, and will be theirs again, if they will seek the light, and not become "rulers of the darkness" instead of being lights unto the world! Still they are the salt of the earth. I praise the clergy. Yet surely these at least, yea, all of *these*, should know where to find the Lord, and not have to send us far off to councils, or require to construct infallible popes. If the men of science, unlike the poor Indian, cannot see God in clouds or hear Him in the wind, and see no purpose in anything (although purpose, indeed, is the only thing which we clearly *do* see in nature *), yet those should be at no loss for God into whose hands the Scriptures have come, and who have been put in charge of Revelation. Do they not read even before Christ came,

* Duke of Argyll's "Reign of Law."

"Lord, how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day;" "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments;" teaching where to find God, and a personal God. And is not this the message which they have as apostles of Christ —"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ"? And again, "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it." Yes, surely those who have "fellowship with the Father" know that they have it, and know what it is. But, writes St. John, "if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Does not then he "walk in darkness" who sends us to future meetings, or who requires an infallible man, or supposes that God is lost, when a link or a page in the conveyance of revelation fails? Has he "fellowship with the Father" who teaches that the reception of a substance, acting irrespectively of knowledge,

is fellowship with the Father? Surely there is great darkness here, and not light! Alas, a false humility and a low ideal of revelation are going far to shut out God. And, alas, as of old, so now we see masters in Israel accepting darkness for light! Yet, no doubt, Christ gave us revelation that we might comprehend it; and because fellowship with the Father was needful for us, and because fellowship could only come by knowledge. Surely so it was in the beginning. So must it be again; and so it will be. The signs of it appear. We believe that the night is "far spent" and that the light is breaking.

The Church must again be that which she was in the beginning. She has fallen long, and in many countries, by altering the terms of her commission; by setting up her own kingdom instead of God's; by teaching that she is the way to God, instead of God the way to her; by beginning, not in the spirit, but in the letter; by saying that it is our doing something which makes a change in God, instead of His being unchangeable which is to make a change in us.

The Church must again proclaim the everlasting Fatherhood of God.

This is that kingdom of the Father which it is the Church's business to bring in, and before which all other kingdoms are to fade away. One great counterfeit kingdom has usurped its place too long, but it is now in its death-pangs; and although means are being taken to regenerate it, it lives but by force of art: indeed the means taken to regenerate will in all probability destroy it.

The kingdom of the Father is advancing; other kingdoms cannot be established—nay, they disestablish themselves. Creeds and confessions, temporalities and privileges, which hinder the true kingdom, wither away. A Holy Father made of men, artificial brotherhoods and sisterhoods, must yield to the one fatherhood, sisterhood, and brotherhood, which men find in God, and in one another. The Church falls when she ceases to see this, and sets up a kingdom which is not this. But the true kingdom is coming, and she will return to her first love. It is the return to this, and the increasing pre-

sence of this light, which made us say that the spiritual keeps pace with the material light in the present rapid progress of the world. The meaning of the words, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all," we believe is being better understood; and this is the kingdom of the Father. There is assuredly now more spiritual light. We have no new revelation; but there is an increasing radiance thrown upon the old. Ancient symbols and technical language, wherever true, are regaining their signification. Christianity is on the increase. The term "Catholic," so often put for "Christian," hinders no doubt many nations, and, where so substituted, tends to make Christianity a thing of the past, a religion at an end; but when "Christian" is substituted for "Catholic," the difficulty disappears, and Christianity is seen to be something which does not pass away. Christ is "the heir of all the ages," of the future as of the past. When truly realised, He brings us into the presence of the living God; and this we find just as we realise that which He truly is. Opening Heaven, He reveals that which is therein,

and shows that it is the bosom of a Father, that it has been and must be so always. By giving us His Spirit, He enables us to find not only that God is, but that *which* He is, so that "He that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also," knows, that is, that which God is, and that He is a Father. Christ reveals that God is not a Fate, but a Father, one who desires not merely our acceptance of a will, but our recognition that the will is good—good even when leading by the way of sorrow and suffering and death. This revelation of the Father by the Son is that merit of Christ by which we are brought to the knowledge of God and saved thereby; for just as we are saved in the spirit of a son we realise the Father. We are saved by walking in Christ's steps. And thus Christ not only reveals *God* and shows us that which *He* is, but He reveals us to ourselves also, and shows us that which *we* are and may be. He reveals to us not a God apart from us, but one with us, so that "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one,"—and we are sons in the sense of "offspring," standing to God in a true relationship, able

to have "fellowship" with the Father, to rise thereby from temporal to eternal levels, and to know that which God is, by a realisation of His nature in ourselves. In doing this, Christ does not relegate us to a God or a Heaven far off, but to one which is nigh. He enables us at once to know God, and to enter into His Heaven. He gives us a kingdom which is immediate, which we feel to be unmistakably our own, of which we ourselves are kings, as, losing ourselves in Christ, we inherit that kingdom of which the treasure is the character of God in Jesus. Finding God in this, we find our brethren also; for that which is in God for us, is only ours because it is in Him for others; that which is in God is common to all, and certain because it is so; this it is which makes Him what He is—God, because He is thus perfect.

His kingdom is coming, and must come; and now it triumphs just as we realise that we are the children of a heavenly Father, and become like Him, who is what He is because He is kind and just to all. Eventually there will be no kingdom but this; no Church and world; but

all Church and no world; and only that Church which is the kingdom of the Father. Soon all kingdoms which have usurped its place, and all Churches which have driven a wicked trade by making a property of God, will be destroyed, and this kingdom come without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, based upon God as light, "in whom is no darkness at all;" an inarticulate cry for which we hear from all quarters of the world.*

And the progress of this kingdom is now greater than many believe. Its essence is already realised in many places, and its "songs without words" are heard, of which it may be the singers themselves are scarce conscious of the meaning. But they are the first-fruits of the kingdom, and its songs nevertheless. And its songs are these.

The still small voice within is recognised as the same as that of Christ without; men are

* It is remarkable to see in such high places of the world as the *Times*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Spectator*, and other newspapers, the leading articles which we have lately seen, and which are nothing less than a crying and hungering for God—children asking for bread. May we not give them stones!

opening to Him that knocks, recognising who it is. The kingdom cometh not as an external kingdom, but its coming can be known. It is a kingdom of truth, and its signs are sure; for these are present wherever there is a desire for reality and the meaning of things. And these are now on the increase. Religion is becoming identified with morality, and morality is believed to be the same in Heaven and earth. Revelation is found not to be the violation but the establishment of morality. The mediæval and reformational interpretations of Revelation are being superseded by the primary. God is being recognised as one whose "tender mercies are over all His works," who loves, not because of the creature's desert, but because of its needs, with a love not merely amiable, but righteous, giving to every one according to his works, and educating as often by punishment as by pardon, "judging that He may teach, not teaching that He may judge;" that *so* man may be saved. God is beginning to be sought for, for that which He is; and good is sought for the same reason, and not "for a purpose." In the *initiatory* love

of God men are finding themselves at rest; they find themselves able to receive all subsequent outcomings in the light of that original; and they know that this is Love; that God did not require us, or was obliged to make us, that He chose to have us; and this because He is Love. And such Love! "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God." Seeing this, we find that we are to have no other joy, no other peace, but the joy and peace of the Lord Himself—that nothing short of "fellowship with the Father" is intended for us; and we lift up our heads. And this is its duration: "Because I live, ye shall live also;" the words of God in Christ—words which *we* should use to those we love; but what a promise and prospect when we know that they are a Divine and therefore eternal utterance! Having this hope and peace, men cease from sin; they cannot sin when they are so born of God. Can any sin when he knows that he has so high an inheritance, so near a relation to the Most High? Can such an one live in sin? in sin, which severs from the Divine connection; in

sin, which is contrary to and grieves the Father; in sin, from which the Son died to deliver us? No one sins as he realises these things. As we realise them we cease from sin. Nay, indeed, a man ceases from sin only as he knows and remembers that he is born of God. There is no other victory over sin. But by this faith—the faith, that is, which realises that we are children dear and precious unto God—we can do all things. As we realise this sonship, sin vanishes, and death disappears—for these are the wages of sin. The kingdom of the Father is a sinless kingdom, as it is set up sin disappears, and it is set up just as we believe in the Father; as we believe or cease to believe that God is our Father, our holy and loving Parent, we are at peace and in purity, or the reverse. When this is believed, *Te Deums* are sung; not only in cathedrals, but on highways and by hedges; when this is believed, not one day in seven, but an eternal sabbath reigns. That we do not see this is our great misdemeanour. That we do not see and receive our common Father is the one great error of man. It was the unceasing

theme of our Lord's astonishment. "Ye can discern the signs of the times," ye can "behold the lily," ye can recognise "the feeding of the ravens," yet not see the heavenly Father, not know the eternal Providence, not hear the everlasting chime, was His constant wonder and sorrow. "He marvelled" (we read) "at their unbelief." "Ye have eyes, and see not; ears, and hear not," He ever said. It was their misfortune; but it was also their fault. It is sin not to do this. It is salvation to do it. For our only salvation is to see and to hear God's voice, and to recognise it as that of a Father. To do this will not indeed alter the circumstances of life, but it will sanctify and glorify them to us. It will raise us up when we fall, to remember that we are God's children—that although God hates sin, He does not hate us. As we realise that God has and can have but one object towards us, even our good; as we realise that as He made us from no obligation, and no need of our service, but from love, our well-being must be precious to Him; as we recognise that He has but one end in view, our perfection, and

that He is achieving this by every method which infinite love and wisdom put in His power; we are at peace. We find that we are in the hands of a Good Shepherd, a Good Physician, a Good Teacher, who is educating us for a blessed eternity with Himself; that God is giving us a fitness for His own presence; making us partakers of His holiness, that we may be also partakers of His blessedness. We find that as we resist we but delay our own happiness.

His kingdom is the only true good; yet, alas, we would ever delay it by seeking our own things. Mercifully God's grace triumphs, and the true kingdom hastens on. God the Father is ever behind all things, and pressing the kingdom on. We have preludes ever and anon of its advent; the notes of its harmonies are now heard more near; the splendour of the day, the true "Conquering Hero," let us believe, is at hand; ere long the clouds will roll away, the groans of travailing nature cease, and nature rejoice throughout as the new man is born into the world, and the Son who was in the bosom of the Father from eternity is complete in the

gathering in of all creation to Himself, the kingdom which cannot be destroyed, whose foundations are in the nature of God. It is a kingdom of which the triumph comes not by force, not by its King putting His feet upon the necks of His enemies, but by their laying them willingly beneath His feet; a kingdom whose establishment is not by obligation or necessity, but by the will and choice of those who are within it. It is God's kingdom, and this is the way *He* triumphs. God, elected by the universal suffrage of creation, is to be hailed as King, and crowned Lord of all; He will not have His kingdom in any other way, because in no other way would He be truly King. But thus will He be truly King, and for this kingdom He waits. For this God waits, and will wait. He waits for His kingdom, the kingdom which comes by the choice of creation, not by orders from above. For this He waits. He waits for the kingdom into which we have been baptized, the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Alas, how long time it takes to come and to be established! How long do we delay it

by our wickedness and sins! *He* does not delay it—He cannot deny Himself—it is we who delay it; and what does our delay gain but the reaping of the fruits of sin—suffering, that is, and sorrow? Behold! He stands at the door and knocks, waiting for His kingdom—standing, how long, and waiting! And He *will* wait until it comes—until, that is, He is known and taken in. Alas, how long are we deaf and do not hear, blind and do not see, and so let our true good stand without! How long do we fight against the true God and eternal life!

But let me conclude. God, seen as our Father, makes all things sweet — all paths straight — reconciles all things. His Fatherhood, once truly accepted, solves all perplexities, and makes the difficulties of life clear and plain. He is our Father, and whatever is meant by that name that is He, and always so. As He was this in the beginning, He is now, and ever shall be. Life, death, make no alteration in this relationship. In life, after death, He is equally the same, and Father. Beyond the shores of death we do not go into a strange

country; it is still our Father's house, where the Father is dealing with His children as they require. No time, no space can destroy His eternal, uniform, and paternal relation. It is life, health, victory, to believe this; just as we believe this do we have victory and life; as we fall out of its belief, we perish. Most true is the dogma—and let us by all means cherish dogma, but in order to its end—that unless we believe God to be our Father we "perish everlastingly." It is the Catholic faith to believe it, that believing it we may be saved. There is no other salvation but by believing this; but this is sure, God is our Father, and ever acts as such. It is good to hear this from the pulpit; it is good to hear it from the press; but, above all, it is good to hear it from our own hearts, and to know that it is true. No doubt, to see the Father "sufficeth us." Amen.

## VI.

## THE NEW YEAR.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me."—PSALM cxxxix. 23, 24.

WITH what shall we begin the coming year which now rises upon us as the day rises?—a day of many sleepings and awakenings, yet but *one* day. Its morning, as that of other days, opening with a pale brightness; the feeble sounds of new life, the expiring embers of old; the noises of early dawn, the first stir of bird and beast; the single voices, the solitary wheels, the matin bells. Is the day to be bright or dark? Shall we have rain or sunshine? Who knows? Last night it was red and windy; this morning it is grey. That is all we know. What is before *us* in the coming year, before ourselves and those we love, we know not. The veiled

figure of the Future stands before us, and we cannot lift the veil. Who would dare to do so? For what may it not conceal? Is the winding-sheet under it, high on our own bosoms? We do not know, and venture not to inquire. Who would like to see the names written on the tombstones of the future year, or roll away the stone from its sepulchres? Sure we are that, ere it ends, some accustomed chair will be empty, some well-known voice be still—

> "There is no flock, however watched and tended,
> But one dead lamb is there;
> There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
> But has one vacant chair."

Some new voices, some new faces, no doubt, will have arisen and be heard and seen among us; but of the old and familiar, no doubt also, some will be "wede away." How are we to face the next twelve months knowing these things? Like Jacob, we struggle with the dark angel, but it will not tell us its name, nor what is behind its veil, neither will it let us go. How are we to encounter it? There is, indeed, but one way in which we can do so with confidence, and it is

"to put our trust in God," to know in whom we trust, and to have reason for believing that in Him we can trust. "Truly our hope is even in Thee:" "In thee, O Lord, have I trusted;" "Thou art my strong refuge." These have ever been the words and ground of trust of those who have gone before us and overcome. But did they know in whom they trusted, and had they sufficient grounds? No doubt they had. But do *we* feel ourselves secure? All things are not equally good, and can we blind ourselves to the fact that it is the same God who sends the widow's cap and the bridal wreath, and fills the sepulchres or leaves them empty? Have we any charm to persuade Him, then, to give us the one, and not the other? to save us from the one, and bestow the other? And is not God the same Providence who, for ages and ages, has been filling this fair earth with millions of millions of living beings, all of whom lived but to be destroyed, and are now dead? We are tempted to cry, as we look at it, "How dreadful is this place!" The more we look at Providence, and the closer we struggle with Him, the greater

grows the darkness, and the mystery, and the fear, and the less and less do we seem to know of His name or to have ground for hope in it. Far off the solemn stars shine over us, and the night winds sigh around; but do they shine or sigh for us? Are they, and is God, concerned at all for us? "Tell me Thy name, and tell it now," as Charles Wesley puts it in Jacob's mouth when he wrestles with the angel of Providence.

> "Wilt Thou not yet to me reveal
> Thy new unutterable Name?
> Tell me, I still beseech Thee, tell,
> To know it now resolved I am:
> Wrestling, I will not let Thee go
> Till I Thy name, Thy nature know."

Certainly, until we get the name or nature indicated by the name of God, and find it good and sufficient, we have no *hope* that is sufficient. What is it to us that Providence is awful and mighty if its power is indifferent or adverse? Something more than merely God or Providence, then, and "one event happening alike to all," must be ours, if our "hope" would mean anything beyond the mirage of fancy. Have we

then any such ground, any such knowledge of God's name, or of the rule of His Providence, as is sufficient to enable us to face the future with confidence? It is a trite answer to the Christian, and an insufficient one to the unbeliever, to say that we have that in Christ. Nevertheless, it is our answer, and it is sufficient, and more than sufficient. It is our answer, and it is enough if we read it aright. How shall we so read it as to find it enough? Let us read it in its plain sense —in a sense such as that which it evidently has, and is meant to set forth, in the contemplation of such questions as we have been asking—and we shall find it enough. Let us take its meaning in such a place as the fifth chapter of the Apocalypse of St. John, and we shall find, I think, all we need. I shall quote the passage at length:—"And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back side, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth,

was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion o the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. And when He had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and has redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." The scene (if we may

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venture so to say) opens with the vision of the throne of God, surrounded with clouds and darkness—these last, no doubt, telling forth the mystery of God's Providence; a book is seen, the book of fate of the future of man and creation; but it is sealed ("the times and seasons the Father hath kept in his own power"), and St. John says "he wept much" because it was so,—that is, because the future was dark and unknown to him; and no man, he says, was able to open it or look thereon. He is told, however, not to weep, that an answer will be given him, which will be enough. "And I beheld," he says (v. 6.), "and, lo, in the midst of the throne . . . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain . . . . And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. . . . . And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof." And "every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth," rejoiced, and was satisfied thereby. The meaning is plain. God does not show the facts written in the book, or disclose the future

beforehand, to any one; but He gives us a key to the character of His government, and bids us find a solution in that He implies that all the facts in His government, or in the books, are in consonance with that key or character; and the key is "the Lamb as it had been slain"—a slain lamb, either sitting on the throne, or at the right hand of the throne, or (as it is often represented in old mosaics in Sicily) resting on the book of Fate, or the future, which is still closed, while the seven seals remain unopened. The meaning of this is plain. It is that Christ is a revelation of the character, and a key to the providence of God; that He is an example to us how we are to act, and how in acting we are to have the victory. God does not in Christ exempt us from any of the evil circumstances of life. He does not alter them for us; but He teaches us, and enables us by His example, to meet and overcome them. He shows us His well-beloved Son, in whom He is continually well pleased, not exempted from evil—on the contrary, subjected to it, and to its effects, in a manner infinitely greater than any in which we

shall be called upon to bear it—and He shows us by the method He overcame how we are to overcome. He identifies Christ with Himself and his providence, and He says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." He says that the "law of Christ," which was to "bear one another's burdens," and to "overcome evil with good," is the law of the universe, the law of God Himself, the law of the Spirit of God, that the laws of God are only revelations of that which He is Himself, and that as He is so are we to be; that there is no other way of overcoming evil; but that thus it is overcome, and with a final and entire defeat. He reassures creation by a revelation of that which He is Himself; and that He is this, He assures and gauges the extent to us by His incarnation and death in Christ. And this *does* reassure creation, and enables man to meet the future, whatever it be, just in proportion as he sees and receives this revelation, and enters into or imbibes its spirit; just as He is filled with the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the universe and of God's providence, the Spirit which converts

evil to good; and does so in us just as we recognise the hand to be good from which it comes, that from the same fountain cometh not sweet water and bitter, and which says, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight;" becoming good in the creature's sight, because good in the Creator's—not that the nature of the thing is changed, but that it is changed in character; if not good in itself, it comes to us to be as if it were so, because of the hand which gives it. The means and power which does this is the sign of the cross, the key to the character of God in Christ. His acts of providence are felt to be in accordance with that manifestation. The victory ever is by this sign; by it the world is converted into the Church, and the book of Fate, the shut future, can be faced without fear. We shall not, and we need not, here set about to prove the truth of the revelation which we have of God in Christ. Its historic and its self-evidencing proofs must be reserved for other seasons; suffice it for us here to assume that it is true, and to know that, by acting on this assumption, its truth becomes

known to us by another and more excellent way; the result being accomplished, than which more could not be done had we begun by external or argumentative proof.

If we find the Father in Christ, and Christ to be the revelation of the Father, we can take all things from His hands, bitter and sweet equally, because believing that they are indispensably needful for the object in view, and that this object is good. By the revelation of God in Christ we are assured of this. With the knowledge of the life and death of Christ we do not expect to be set above the experience of all the various circumstances of life, or to have them altered for us here; we do not expect to be delivered from evil here altogether, or from the penalty of sin at all; we do not imagine that we shall be exempted from the operation of the providential laws of God. What we expect and desire is, to know and do the will of God, and to be set above the penalties due to its violation, by ceasing to violate it in acquiring and retaining fellowship with God. Christ has given us "fellowship" with God

by giving us knowledge, and such knowledge as leads to the desire to learn and do His will. This He has done. And in what He has done, instead of leading us to desire exemption from His law or will, He has made that will our desire. Our prayer now is, "Search me, O Lord, and know my heart: and see if there be any wicked way in me"—any way contrary to Thy will—"and lead me in the way everlasting." He enables us to face the future, not by expecting or desiring exceptions, but by finding in it the will of God, and that will necessarily good, whatever it may be. He enables us to find in God's will and providence the light and support of our life.

This does not require, it rather obviates the necessity of requiring, the reason for or the meaning of the words, "Why hast Thou made me thus?" We believe in the revelation that God in Christ is good, and must do good. Man finds himself in conditions over which he has little control, and of many of which he was not the cause. Death reigns over many who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's trans-

gression. Geology opens up mountains of dead, the victims of death, ages ere the birth of Adam. Our fathers' sins are visited on their children. Darkness and mystery, part of which we seem able to explain, but much of which must ever remain inexplicable to finite beings, surround us. We accept the part which we do not understand, that part which seems and is to us evil, for the whole which we do understand; for the whole which is good, the real character of the Divine nature, which is wholly good, as seen in Christ. This is our strength, and peace, and assurance; and it is enough—enough as to the present, and enough wherewith to meet the future. If we do not understand or like it, we understand and are reconciled to it in Him. We are sure, from what we see and understand in Him, that we ought to be satisfied, and we *are* satisfied with its likeness in Him. He is our guarantee and proof that nothing beyond need come upon us, that the government of God is good, and can be accepted in all its aspects by the light and strength which flow from Him.

The incarnation and death of Christ—God

there manifest in the flesh—is the groundwork on which we are enabled to build all things. When this openeth no man can shut, and when this shutteth no man can open. It is the foundation and keys of the Church; its rock, and power of binding and loosing; the meaning and object of the Church. It is the key we have to open with, the foundation whereon to stand. Blessed are the eyes which see the things that we see, and the hands which have to offer that which we offer. Blessed are we to be heralds, not of winter, but of summer; to have to say that God's promises to the world in Christ are "Yea and Amen." In Christ it is all Yea. This is good news for a New Year. Nay, is not this the ground of the Hallelujahs in the Apocalypse? Is it not that God is what He is—that the Lamb slain was not slain merely to be slain, but to destroy death throughout eternity—that what He did, He did not do to be defeated, but to bring in everlasting life and everlasting righteousness, to show that where sin abounds, grace much more abounds—that the Creator is not bound by the creature, but the creature by the

Creator—that we are only straitened in our own bowels, and not by that which is in God? The Church's great mission and message to mankind is "Sursum corda;" Lift up your hearts. Its mission is to set forth an everlasting Eucharist or thanksgiving; to baptize the world into the name of its Father in Christ; to baptize it into that name and Holy Spirit; to show the Father to the world—not some one's Father, but *its* Father, not "my" Father, and "his" Father, but *our* Father—so that all may know and feel their common inheritance, and home, and ground of welcome to be in this, that God is our common Father, and one who does not give according to our deserts, but according to our needs and His own glory—which is not only in the being, but in the well-being of His creatures—and who is achieving that well-being by an education in righteousness. His glory will be in its fruition. Our duty and joy is to take part in and help towards this end, as fellow-workers with God. This we do just as we do or do not make God rightly known. This is the sign of a standing or of a falling church, of

a free or bound, of a dead or living church, of a church with a future, or whose future (so to speak) is in the past. Let us strive to make God known—God in Christ as pardoning sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty—God dealing with the world as a Father, a Father and Redeemer in Christ. If this life be in us, it will blossom—blossom by holding forth the word of this life—holding forth that not death but life is before us, and that under whatever dress it comes or appearance it puts on, God is concealing a necessary teaching. Let this be our lesson and strength for the ensuing year; let us believe that the teaching, whatever it may appear to be, is yet good, and that it cannot but be good, as being part of the way from and to Him, who Himself, because of what He is, must ever be "the Ocean to the river of our lives."

## VII.

## THE SECOND ADVENT.

"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."—REV. xxii. 11.

THERE are seasons when the questions of judgment and self-examination come uppermost in our minds. Especially is the close of a year such a season. We are just now at that period. "The year is gone beyond recall, with all its joys and fears." What are we, then, at the end of it? Are we better or worse than we were at its beginning? The same we cannot be. Is our spiritual being and condition better? For out of that arises the river of our lives. If the source is clear and pure, so will be the river; if turbid and troubled, so will the river be also. This may seem to us to

be but a truism. It is one, however, on which depends the happiness or misery of our lives, their success or unsuccess. Much success as to outward things *may* depend on causes over which we have no control; but, on the whole, the circumstances of our lives are ruled by what we are ourselves. Over this it is possible for us to exercise great control, at least at the outset of our lives. When once habits are formed—moral habits—it is different; but until then, towards their formation we can do much. When once a habit is formed, it is indeed difficult, nay, it would seem all but impossible, after a certain time, to change it, whether it be good or whether it be evil. It would seem as if in some sort we were machines, on which, if a certain stamp is once made, it will, with its exciting cause, invariably reappear.

We have all perhaps observed, who are in the habit of hearing musical chimes, or the routine of tunes on one musical instrument, that if the accustomed rotation is changed, the mind runs on with the other, the accustomed tune entangling it with the new, so that we can

scarce discriminate the new or the alteration. So it is with moral habits: once formed, either for good or evil, the old will run off with the new, and in many cases, and after a certain habituation, overcome it. The exciting cause will invariably be followed by the accustomed effect. The effect seems to be photographed upon us, and the revolution of the handle brings up the accustomed picture. It looks as if, after a certain period, the words of our text were pronounced, as judgment, as of a state fixed, invariable and eternal—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still." How all-important, then, our habits, our holiness, our sinfulness! On this our eternal well-being depends. The reign of moral law would appear to be as fixed and invariable as that of physical law; and if so, how important that we should get into right relations with it, and with God, its cause and constituent! All-important is it to realise this; else we are apt to get into false relations both with law and God, expecting what cannot be done, believing what is not true or possible. For instance, men sin, as it is called; they violate the

rule of their conscience, or of some outward law; and they feel uncomfortable. They wish there were no such law; that is the first impression; and the first effect of their sin is a feeling of injury. They do not like the restraint, they do not like the consciousness of transgression, they feel that they have a quarrel with the Lawgiver, and they think He has a quarrel with them. It becomes, or is supposed to be, a personal matter. Then it follows that if they repent they think that they have done their part, that all is as it was before, and that if the Lawgiver forgives, all is over. They forget that the law is good, imposed, because it is good and for good, by One who does good because He is good, and that the alteration or removal of law would be evil, which therefore cannot be altered either in itself or in its effects. They forget or do not realise this, and, considering the affair to be a personal matter, suppose that with personal feeling all is ended. And in a certain sense this is true. But this view ignores their true relations with the Creator. They quite forget, and we all too often forget, that the Almighty did not create

us from necessity, but from choice; from desire, that is, for *our* happiness—a happiness, however, which can only be secured in a certain way, and that by the way of the laws which He has laid down for us. We forget this, or we do not know it; and, therefore, when we sin, we first take up the attitude that God has something to get from us, and that, if we pay it, it is all right. We sin: we have not paid it. We then assume the attitude of penitents as if to pay it; and we may feel sorry, as we remember God's goodness towards us: we are sorry, and we say we are sorry, and then we suppose all is right. And so far as the sorrow is genuine, it *is* all right, as restoring the true relation between us and our Creator, and with the laws which He has laid down for our good. But, then, this is not all. He *has* laid down the laws for our good. Their alteration, therefore, would be evil; they are complete in all their parts. When we violate them, they avenge themselves, that evil may be destroyed. This vengeance is part of the good of the law, and its operation, even when penitence comes in, is not dispensed with. It is

a law that when a man drinks to intoxication his head suffers. It would be injurious to the man did not the suffering follow; it would be injurious to the man were the suffering removed. It is not removed, therefore, even if he repent. God may forgive the man. His relation to His offspring is ever to have mercy; but still the suffering on transgression goes on, even after repentance. It would not be mercy did it not go on; it is mercy which carries it on. It cannot in the nature of things be dispensed with; it is part of the law for removing sin and crime from the sinner. "Shall not He reward every man according to his works?" But blessed is the man that is so rewarded; for "the blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil." God, therefore, does not dispense with the consequences of transgression, not because He is not merciful, but because mercy here would do no good. He is merciful when He inflicts punishment for sin; He would be unmerciful did He not so requite sin.

But men do not or will not see this, and when they sin put themselves into a false attitude

with God. They think if they repent He will take off the punishment, and that, as we have said, it is a personal matter, and that an act of favour might or should be done, and the consequences of sin removed. But it is not done; and cannot be done without reversing the whole laws and wise and benevolent arrangements of the government of God. It is in physical as in moral nature: if a man falls and breaks his leg, the breaking is the consequence of the fall, it is no arbitrary infliction; if he gets intoxicated, his spiritual life is lowered. Yet, strangely, when the moral laws are recited in a man's ears, he seems to think some injury is done him, whereas they are for his good. He is not angry at hearing that putting his finger in the flame will pain him; but if he is told not to covet, and to prefer others to honour before himself, he feels that an injury is done him, or, at all events, that if he obey he is deserving of thanks: he will not or does not see that it is for his own good. We can generally discover our true relations to God by trying what are a father's to his own children here. A child, for example, takes

away and breaks an ornament he was told not to touch. He is sorry; he confesses; his father forgives him; but this does not restore the ornament. Again, he is told not to go to a certain house; he does go, and takes the scarlet fever. His father forgives him for violating his command; but this does not remove the fever. And what good would it be to us to be the king's children, if we were dying of small-pox? We shall not carry this into the higher region where word and law are identical. This is enough, in a general way, for the aspects of the moral law here in its relation to God.

Sin is an injury done to our own nature—an offence against our own souls—an injury to the beautiful and the good within us. It is no doubt an injury to our neighbour, to God's good universe, and to God Himself. But first of all, and chiefly, it is a sin against our own selves, an evil inflicted on our own nature. It is an *irrevocable* evil; for not even the Almighty power can *uncommit* an act once committed.*

* Greg's "Creeds of Christendom," and Law's "Spirit of Prayer" (*passim*).

It joins the irrevocable past, and brings irrevocable consequences, and we cannot recall the dead to write another epitaph. The inscription of what we were is eternally engraven upon ourselves. We ourselves are the books out of which the judge is to read the sentence; for we ourselves are the crop of our own sowing. Sin contains its own retribution as naturally as the seed the crop. Every one makes his own future by his own sowing; and the judgment just is what we are. Sin cannot have any other or any greater punishment than its own consequence, which is not arbitrary, but simply the fruit of the seed we sow. The crop is involved in the sowing. God does not sit in judgment on it at last as a judge, but has ordained the consequences from the first as a legislator. But we do not realise this. We conceive in the case of sin that contrition will change results, and put all straight. It puts all straight in one sense, as we have said, because it rectifies our relations morally with God, but in no such sense as that sin is as if it never had been. Wherefore it is that to obey is better than sacrifice, not that

sacrifice would not then be needed, but because no sacrifice can take the place of, or be as good as, the original good.

We too little realise in daily life the tremendous importance of these things. We hear God's laws read, and know them as proclamations against sin, and deal with them as arbitrary commandments which personal relationship may affect. We do not consider that their operation is and must ever and invariably be the same, because it is good;* but we imagine that somehow we shall escape from the evil consequences of sin by some personal act of favour on God's part in the way of dispensation; and so we muddle on too often through life in the belief that somehow, some time, it will be all right, and that in some mysterious but delightful way God will—as we phrase it—be gracious to us, recall the operation of His own laws, let the past sin be as if it never had been, and let us go free as if we had never sinned. But this is impossible,

* How far things which are to us evil, but which so far as their work is good are themselves good, are separate, or separable from God, personally, we need not here discuss.

and after a certain time, when a fixed habit is formed, whether for good or evil, the operation of the law and its results seem to become unalterable—stamped upon us so that, as is said in our text, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

How all-important, then, is a good choice! How terrible or blessed the acquisition of habits! If as the tree fall it lies, if there is no change beyond the grave, if the words of our text be ever spoken to us, is there then no hope, no hope for the confirmed sinner—none beyond the grave if none here—no possibility of a change there, or escape there, if not here? Roman Catholics tell us of purgatory—but there is little Scripture warrant for the belief—and they tell us of a hell prepared for those who are too bad for purgatory—too confirmed, that is, in evil habits—too far gone to cure—hopeless because irreclaimable. But then we may be asked—and it is time—What is the meaning of Christ? Is there not a

Gospel? What is the Gospel? Is it not news of salvation for sinners? Most certainly it is. There is hope for sinners; and that hope is in Christ.

But then we must observe that Christ comes not to deliver us from the consequences of sin or its punishment, so much as from sin itself. And He comes to deliver us from sin by setting us above it, above its commission, and therefore beyond the range of its consequences. He sets us above its commission, and, delivering us from the cause, delivers us from its results. He prevents its commission. He does not free us from the penalty of sin after commission. He comes to give us a more abundant life, and, by so doing, to set us above death and its kindred. He is a Saviour, and He saves by uniting us with Himself, thereby setting us free from punishment by setting us free from sin. He that abideth in Him sinneth not; and, just as He abideth, he that lays hold of Him lays hold of eternal life, and in so doing passes from death unto life. If he lets it go and sins, he suffers as before, and falling into transgression reaps its

consequences. If he repents and does his first works he is saved, yet so as by fire; he bears about with him a suffering broken body, the monitor of his sin; a body more disposed to sin than before; to drag which up to the heights above is more difficult than before. A sinner who yields to sin, be it man or woman, has tenfold more difficulty in refraining from sin thereafter than one who has not yielded. To keep out is easier than to put out. After a time, it would seem as if it were not possible to put out; and therefore it is written, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still."

But what, then, you will say, is our hope? For surely the motive power is not with us; the well of life is with God. Can we not, may we not, be recovered by the act of God? Assuredly we may. What is grace but this? Who makes one to differ from another? And have we not all a claim—an equal claim—upon Him? Christ's blood was shed equally for us all; and from the love of which that is the proof and token none can snatch us. In that blood, then, we may all

wash and be clean. Our hope and our cleansing is in this—in what God is; in what we see Him in Christ to be; in that in God of which Christ was the gauge and token, and which was equally in God before as after it was given; which was given because its cause was there before; which is not exhausted by the gift, but which in bestowing the gift gave the way whereby that of which it was the outcoming should operate and effect its purpose, namely, the love of God—the love of God revealed to us and made apprehensible and practicable for us in Jesus Christ our Lord. That love in God once there is there for ever. It has been from ever, and shall be ever there. It sent the Son from beyond the farthest of the twinkling stars, and through the depths of an erring and corrupted nature, until it found itself in the human heart. It knew what sin was and its consequences; it felt what a revolt from and rejection of the highest good must be, and what the eternal perdition would be. *Ecce Homo!*

He heard the cry, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me," "*Domine ne despicias opera*

*tuarum manuum.*" He heard the sighing of the prisoner, "Give me understanding, that I may keep Thy commandments." He saw the stumbling feet and the weary frame, and came as a light to the path and help to the weary; and he too, being weary—(*fessus est*)—sat by the well, and taught. Yes; He took mortality to His bosom, and departed with it to prepare a place for it, where and how we know not. But He came, and He is gone, to save. Let us be sure of that; an assurance which rests and depends not upon what we are ourselves, or on what is in us, but on what He is, and what is in Him.

But He who tasted death for every man, leaves us here to learn the wages of sin that they are death, and to taste death ourselves. And how does this operate on us? By looking unto Jesus, first remembering what He was, and then, in our measure—and blessed are we the larger is our measure—by becoming what He was. He overcame by what He was. He overcame evil with good. We can only overcome

in the same way. It is only by and in the love of Christ—Christ's love—the same kind of love—that we can hope to put down whatever opposeth; overcoming evil with good. The love of Christ constraineth us to be what He was: our having the love of Christ will enable us to constrain others to rise—to rise until they are as we are, or are subdued, turned, counted from opponents and evil to be one with us and good. This is the way—infallible, sure—just as we rise up to and possess it. To give this, Christ came; to enable us to have it He showed it, exercised it, gave it. It was in Him before—that is, in God; but to show it, and for God to give it in and by the way He did, was grace. This was the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. He did this; He took and put aside all other and lower things to make room for this and to do this. Thus we shall do it, and can do it; thus we can resist temptation, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness. This is the power of the Lord Jesus; the justification of us by faith in Him; the grace of the

Lord Jesus, who by His doing this is Lord and our Lord; whom because of this we choose for our Lord and follow.

Doing this, the day comes when though our sins were as scarlet they become as white as snow, not forgiven or forgotten by ourselves, yet having no more dominion over us, law being changed from a bondage to become a guide—a condition which, although freed from sin, has no consciousness or thought of merit, but which enthrones the Lamb as the centre and support of Heaven, and is the source of the songs of praise therein "to Him that was slain, and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

As yet we have not come to that land of flowers. Yet it is before us, and we are on the way. Let us, therefore, with the beginning of a new year, watch our steps, seeking the right and true path, and so following it on that we shall be in no danger of losing it, but rather, sowing to the spirit and treading in the steps of the just, shall find the road easier and brighter as we

proceed—until the happy day dawns when all good shall be confirmed and assured to us, and it shall be said, "He that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Amen.

## VIII.

## THE DIVINE NATURE.

"And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."—ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 39, 40.

PERHAPS it may have passed through our minds, as it did through those of the Jews, that if He had been the Son of God He *would* have come down from the cross. Yet a moment's reflection ought to convince us that it would not be so; that precisely because He is the Son of God He could not come down. For why was He there at all? He was there voluntarily; He was there for a purpose. He could not come down until it was accomplished. What then was that purpose? It was the salvation of a world—a purpose which showed and proved His divinity by the method of its accomplishment. We talk of Christ's divinity, and in some

sort we believe it. But do we realise in what His divinity consists, or why He is divine? The divine—what is it? No doubt the Most High; but most high in what? In that surely which is itself most high, love and righteousness, in which He who is highest is God. He is God by the right divine of perfect love and righteousness. Herein consists and is proved the divinity of Christ. One with God, of one will, one heart, one mind, having without measure the Holy Spirit of the one God, being, as we read, "in the form of God," He came to do that which was according to this form. He came to save a world lying in wickedness in the only way in which it could be saved; and that He found to be by the sacrifice of Himself. Herein is divinity, and this was His. He could not but do it; for it was but acting according to what His nature led Him to do. It would have been a violation of His divinity not to do what He did—a violation of His love and righteousness. There was but one way—the sacrifice of Himself. He took it because He could not but take it; it was the only divine way, the

only way for God. Does this take away from the good and grandeur, or what we call the merit, of the work, or make it less likely to be successful? The word "merit" cannot be applied to God. What He does is right, neither more nor less. Does it then lower the estimation of Him and His work? Do the Levite and the priest, or the good Samaritan, stand highest in our estimation? Surely he who did not pass by him who was in need. Assuredly that which is most high, and in which true power lies, consists not in being ministered unto, but in ministering; this is the true divinity, and the divinity of Christ. But men do not believe this; and, not believing it, adopt false methods to attain power; yea, they employ force—pains and penalties of this life—to exalt even the name of Christ. Alas! it is the opposite way to be successful. Who now, after eighteen hundred years of His history, is king of men? The lords of force? Alexander? Napoleon? Is it not rather the meek and lowly Christ? Not the popes and bishops, but the hidden and lowly saints.

In Christ upon the cross this is set before us in its highest, and there, as at the cradle of Bethlehem, it is that the angelic song breaks forth, *Gloria in excelsis Domino.* He who was rich became poor for the salvation of a world; and the world is saved by His poverty. Yet never was God more rich than then. For it is the Lamb "as it had been slain"—God, that is, emptied of driving force—which is the centre of the adoration of heaven. Christ came to save a world lying in wickedness, dead to and unconscious of the true good. It was to be made alive to it, and conscious, by His self-sacrifice, and He suffers until it be accomplished. He still suffers, and must suffer, until the sin and suffering of the world is ended. Can it be otherwise? Behold the man! And behold the world! A sad world, lying in wickedness—babes born, cast out and famished; husbands and wives severed by death, and worse, by wickedness; fathers and children estranged from each other; poor honest men touching their hats to proud unrighteous men for liberty to work, for leave to labour to maintain their families; quiet men

driven to the wars by kings and emperors, wars from which the poor peasantry reap nothing; rogues successful; and, yet more strange, multitudes of men gaining an honest livelihood by disease, and death, and strife—doctors, lawyers, soldiers; surely all but maggots on the corpse of a decaying world which requires such things—a world whose head is sick, and heart faint, and life out of course! A sad world—and yet how near to joy! Beautiful as well as stricken—beautiful externally, mechanically; beautiful internally, spiritually; beauteous faces, beauteous hearts; hearts ever seeking, seldom finding; ever fearing, ever hoping, never at rest; ever touching, never realising; ever falling short of holding; seeing, but not possessing; the ideal higher than the real; intentions higher than fulfilment; songs without words; a sad wind sighing through the forest; the very flowers containing thoughts that often lie too deep for tears;—an unintelligible world, of weary weight to man! Christ realised all this—what the world was to man. He heard the groaning and travailing of creation in its outward and,

so far, inevitable aspects; but, more than this, He realised in man the deaf ear which would not hear, the blind eye which would not see, and the hardened heart which would not feel what it might have seen and heard and felt of God as corrective of all this. The whole was vocal unto Christ, and entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. And, notwithstanding their wilful sin, He heard the cry:—"It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves." "We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture." "Despise not Thou, O Lord, the work of Thine own hands." "Truly my hope is only in Thee." Christ heard—the Son who is in the bosom of the Father heard — this voice, and the voice, too, of the Father. He heard the desire, and He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." It was divine to hear, divine to do, and to do the work as it could only be done to accomplish its purpose. He had to make manifest the divine, and, by making manifest, infect mankind with it. He had to justify the ways of God to man, and yet this in such a manner as would lead them to accept and glorify

God in them. He was to seek and save the lost; to seek the lost where lost, and restore by seeking. It was in the flesh they had gone astray; it was in the flesh they were to be sought and found. He took, therefore, the flesh of humanity, and He took it that by so doing He might take the manhood into God. Man had sought good apart from the true good: the true good had, first of all, to be set before him. God is the true good, and man had become ignorant of God. Ignorance had produced alienation, and alienation enmity. Christ revealed Himself the true God and good together. He revealed these in revealing love and righteousness—the true love, the true right. "Ask a sign," He seemed to say; "ask it either in the depth, or in the height above." And He gave us a sign—a proof of what God and the true good is, a pledge and proof which cannot be gainsaid, and cannot be exhausted. By His life on earth, and by His suffering on the cross, He prepared a means for the salvation or healing of the world—a means which, wherever accepted, has achieved its end. His sufferings have drawn man to

Himself, and in so drawing have withdrawn him from sin and its consequent sufferings. Thus He suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, to put an end to sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness; and wherever this has been seen and accepted, the end has been accomplished. It has not altered the circumstances of nature or the course of life; but it has enabled us to be independent of them, and to triumph over them. If the child will play with fire, it is burnt. But now it knows what fire is, and that it is not the will of the Father that it should play with it; yea, that in rescuing it from fire, Christ Himself suffered, and does suffer. Man's will is free, and left free; but now he feels an influence attracting him, not to lay it down, but to place it in the channel of the Father's will. He has become a son, with the spirit of a son, and finds in obedience perfect freedom, the glorious but relinquished liberty of the sons of God.

Christ, by reconciling us to the will of God, by showing us God, and declaring to us that as is the fountain so is the stream, gives us power

to accept the will of God, and in accepting it to abstain from turning the laws of the Divine government to our own destruction. Christ does this by what He suffered for us. But we must not suppose that His sufferings were penal or punishments. They arose out of His accepting the conditions of our nature while retaining His own. Sin was brought into close connection with Him, and wounded Him. He mourned over it; He wept over Jerusalem because of its destruction for its sins. He wept, but His tears were not penal; they were tears of compassion and sorrow, of acquiescence also in the righteous judgments of God upon sin. His sufferings reconciled us to God, and to God's punishments for sin. They were acceptable to the Father, and well-pleasing, not as *sufferings*, but because of the end and motive; acceptable because they were a way to an end, an end desired, and not to be accomplished otherwise. They were sufferings which involved the cessation of all suffering. In this sense they were acceptable to God. And now by means of them the world is becoming what Christ beheld when for the joy that was

set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame.

Christ's sufferings were vicarious, but real—vicarious in being for the sake of others, real because undergone by Himself; for the sake of others as giving life, new life to the world by His dying. But the point of the sufferings of Christ is that they are the sufferings of God. As the sufferings of a mere man they could not affect us beyond what our own sufferings affect. But if of God, then the aspects and foundations are wholly different. If it is asked, 'Can God Himself suffer? Is suffering possible to the Divine nature?' We answer assuredly, 'Yes; if God be love.' A moral is the proof of a personal nature, and in its highest sense is God. And as moral natures suffer at sin, or in its presence, so must they in proportion to their elevation. This involves the highest suffering in God. In His case it is vicarious suffering, because resulting from the sins of others; but though not arising from personal sin, yet is it true suffering and sorrow. The suffering keeps pace and is one with the love; for all true pain, like all true joy,

is the product of love. If God be not love He is nothing; at least, we can then form no conception of Him, and can know nothing worthy of being God.

We believe, however, that He is love, and capable of suffering as love suffers—not physically of course, but as that which is highest in us suffers, our moral nature. Our highest nature, our moral nature, that whereby we reach most high, cannot mislead us so far as, when it brings us to our highest, to leave us outside of and without any knowledge of God. How then does He suffer? We see it in Christ. Love ever suffers at the lessening of the beloved; and God therefore suffers in the sinning of His children. He must so suffer until their sin be ended. Christ came to take away suffering by taking away sin, and He suffered that sin might be ended. And His atonement consisted not only in sorrow for our sin and in sympathy for our suffering, but He initiated suffering for Himself that He might take away man's sin and suffering. By His own suffering He was to end sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness. He

suffered—the Just for the unjust—that we might acquire the righteousness of God thereby. This is the righteousness and standing which we have in Christ. He underwent that which otherwise He need not have undergone, that man need not undergo it. This was His merit, and the way in which His suffering was vicarious. He came under the law of death that we might escape from it. He became poor that we might become rich. "Verily, verily," He said, "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." God could not abide alone more in redemption than in creation. His purpose was to bring forth much fruit in creation, to restore fruit in redemption, and to lift man up by engrafting him on a higher tree —to end death by dying. To deprive sin of its wages, death, by depriving sin of existence, Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Revealing God, He gives fellowship with Him: such fellowship as cries, "My Lord and my God"—a fellowship which passes through death, and by means of it into eternal life; which in

the very midst of the outpouring says, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight," looking not at the cup but at the hand, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. He shows us that Just One by Himself being the Just One, by abiding holy in the midst of contradiction, by recognising the holiness of God in the apparent end of all perfection; finding, in the wreck of worlds, "Thy commandment is exceeding broad." He received man's injustice to Himself, and man was smitten by the justice of God. He received the venom from the sinner, and the sinner became clean. He was the scapegoat, the butt of men's evil passions—they had their outcoming in Him. He received them into Himself, was crucified, dead, and buried. But then His victory began. He was carried by the rich to His burial, and from that day to this His train has been followed with increasing numbers, until first the religion of the Jews and then of the Greeks was swallowed up into it, and nations and kindreds whom no man can number. Kings, Emperors, and Cæsars swelled His procession, and were themselves forgotten in it,

and shall be until all thrones, dominions, and powers, will be swallowed up and lost within it, and Christ will reign as King over all creation by virtue of what He is. Men will behold Him whom they have pierced. They shall see the King who turned not His back on the smiters, and proclaim a King for ever come, a kingdom which cannot be overthrown, which renews itself and regenerates its subjects at every contemplation of what it is. They shall recognise God's blessed nature and their own position, and say, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!" —reigneth by what He is—"Our Father which art in Heaven."

From the days of Christ there has been a great restoration and elevation of humanity; broken down, no doubt, by ebbs, and corruptions, and by false Christs, and deceiving Antichrist, and evil angels; but the procession and progress have gone on, and are still going on. All men are more or less influenced by it, the standard of Christ being the standard of humanity; and in this sense already is Christ judging the world. Churches and kingdoms have

been based on that foundation; and churches and kingdoms not on that foundation have been thrown down. True it is that the *names* have often been given falsely, Christ being worshipped by other names, and others than Christ having falsely borne His name; but, under whatever name, the kingdom has gone on, righteousness and truth have kissed each other and looked down on the world and gathered strength therein since the days and by the coming of Christ. He whom men rejected has been by men accepted, and is gradually and by their own choice putting all things under His feet. Christ increases and must increase. He suffered for a purpose, and that purpose must be accomplished. It is the resurrection and salvation of humanity. He cannot be unsuccessful. He did not come for defeat but for victory. It is true in the nature of things that evil is overcome of good. In the highest nature, as that of man, it must be the truest of all things. He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. He reigns by doing so. Is there to be any place where God is not to reign?

There is none. Christ is the way of all; for in Him we see God willing our salvation. His will cannot be eternally frustrated, for it cannot be that the Omniscient should will the impossible. We see not yet all things put under Him; but in Christ we have its pledge. When the stone was rolled away from the sepulchre of Christ, the new Adam was the restorer of humanity; there was a new birth, a new song, a new heaven, a new earth, and Paradise. We see not yet the fruition of it all, for death still reigns; but it is being buried with the gradual burial of sin, and we wait in faith for the full completion. As yet praise waits in Zion, but the harps and music are in our hands. At the reappearance of the Conqueror, with the head of the dead serpent, when we see Him, the music will burst forth.

But now we wait in faith. Often we sow in tears, our seed is hid in the earth, our hopes out of sight, our prayer as morning clouds passing out of sight in vapour; but the act has been accomplished, the thing done; it is in the nature of things impossible that it should not bear its

fruit. Christ Himself, whilst here, showed His own premonition of it when He said, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth." Because of this He ascended the cross, and did not descend save by the gate of death; for He knew that that gate opened a wide vista to Him, and by Him to humanity. It was a way of suffering, the way of the cross. But it bore much fruit on it. The cup was bitter. He was despised and rejected by those His love came to save. He prayed the Father if possible to remove the cup. "If it be possible," He cried. It was not possible, and therefore He drank it—drank it as the Holy Child Jesus, as a babe, saying, "Even so Father." But then it was finished, and forthwith He entered into rest, a rest wherein He received the keys of hell and of death, and likewise those of Heaven, which He bestows on all who see in Him the ways and works of God—keys which make those alive for evermore who know what they are, and how to use them. Alas, how many have claimed to have them who knew them not, and used them as if they were their own!

What do these keys for us? How far can we use them? By His cross and passion Christ reveals and gauges unto us the nature and purposes of God. He bids us have confidence in God. He says by them, "It is I; be not afraid." Are any now faint-hearted at the turning of those keys? The shadows fly away. Are any tempted to sin at those holy symbols? Sin hides its head. In the hour of death, in the day of judgment, in the day of sunshine and joy, they equally save and redeem us. They are the arms on the royal banners in the day, the watchword of the sentinels at night, a pledge and prophecy of the morning.

"He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" "I am persuaded," adds St. Paul, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

No doubt the time is long, but the thing is

certain. Once there it is always there, for there is no change in God. The saints, perhaps, have already cried, "Lord, how *long?*" And there is need of patience; but we must remember that Christ Himself is also waiting and suffering. For Christ cannot but suffer at the continued presence of sin. He has no interest in delaying. It is we who prevent the kingdom by our backwardness. But, also, there is time required for our own perfecting—a long time for the education of immortal souls. It took long to make the worlds: it will take longer to perfect immortal souls. Let us have patience. In God all things are garnered, and all things safe. If we reflect, the more we consider it the more we are satisfied that all is well. God is omniscient. God is almighty. He desires the world's welfare. He cannot desire the impossible, and He is equal to and engaged in carrying the possible well-being on—God, that is, as seen and gauged to us in Christ. No doubt if God be not as seen in Christ, we are indeed wide of our mark, and poor indeed; yea, of all men most miserable. But if God be

not Christ and as Christ, in what form can we imagine Him? How can we have that response within us to Christ as the Most High if no original exists of the conception we have formed? He could not have been, and we could not have been. But both are; and the highest in them is the same. Our lights are from His light; our lesser from His greater. We cannot be the Most High; we feel that there is higher than we in that in which we are highest. We know what is the most high in us ourselves; we find it higher and better in Christ, and therefore know that to be the original from whence we came. From what we are we know what He is—only higher and better in that in which we are best, the love and righteousness by which He made and keeps the worlds. And if we say, 'Yea, but where is He Himself?' are we not involved in a system of law, which has no room for an external personalty, and no ending or beginning? I know that I am greater than law, and that law must have had and have a Lawgiver. The object of law is different from law, higher and evincing an origin beyond the law,

an origin independent of the law, which, as all law has beneficence for its root, is a blessed origin, an origin of bliss, as its effluence is blessing. And if we rise from physical to moral law, how much more is this evident—not only as moral law is concerned with higher things, but as it evinces that the lower are but ministers to the higher, and that their well-being can only consist in the attainment of moral blessings. What is that but to say that there is an origin for all this, an origin like itself, of which it is the outflow and reflection—an origin which, having regard to persons, is Himself a Person, nay, the *Persona* and reality of all things which are good? A Persona which has good for His object must Himself be good, the good and cause of good to all; the cause and maintenance of all that is good, ever pushing this forward to its completion in the moral perfecting of His creatures, the lower being subservient to, and having its being in accordance with, the accomplishment of the higher.

Our assurance is based upon what He is, not upon that which we are in ourselves; that as

He is our Father He will not let us perish; that as we are the sheep of His pasture He will not let us want for pasture; that He despises not the work of His own hands, nor will leave our souls in hell or suffer us to see corruption. This gives us confidence towards God, not only as to ourselves, but as to others; as there is nothing which we did not receive, and none of us have any special merit to plead, so we feel that His dealing with others will be and is as sure as with ourselves, for their higher and ever increasing happiness. The way is different with different persons, made easier or more difficult as men accept or reject the teaching and leading of God; but that teaching ever goes on, and has the same end in view—not destruction but salvation. Those who have passed out of sight, therefore, we confidently commit to Him as unto a faithful Creator, beseeching Him to undertake for them. It is not a personal salvation we want; no one can want a personal salvation. There can be no such thing. What would one be saved alone? "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it;" that is the salva-

tion we seek, and which is promised by God. What source has this desire? Surely the source whence we ourselves come! What other source? For can we desire more than He who is the Source of desire? Let us not say, 'What were we if Thou wert not?' which is indeed much; but 'How could we have been hadst Thou never been?' And how can we desire more in the direction of good than the Author of desire?

God liveth ever, and ever is the same, and, because of what He is, our future is determined, "for we shall see Him as He is," and to see Him as He is we must be like Him as He is. He draws us to Himself by that which is best within ourselves, teaching us thus what He is. Let us thus draw near. Let us rise to Him by love. Let us comfort ourselves by what He is. Let the mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus—to overcome by love. Let us love and grow by trust. God waits and works. Let us wait and work also. He was patient upon the cross and would not come down, because of what He is and had to do there. Let us be and do the same, trusting to the same.

Let us be patient; and yet also impatient, for in a very true sense Christ is still hanging upon the cross. Where sin and sinners are, there again and ever Christ is crucified. So long as sin goes on it must be so, and the kingdom of the Father be deferred. While sin reigns that is deferred; it is only perfected or brought in where there is no spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; and until these disappear Christ still suffers. He is patient, but patience means suffering. Let us not inflict more on that Divine Spirit who now helps us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

These are but elementary truths; but, nevertheless, they reach deep into the heart of things, and are at the foundation of the eternal kingdom. They are but silver edges of the cloud which surrounds God's providence; still, they are silver. A cloud must more or less ever surround the providence of God. For what creature can equal the Creator, or understand all His wisdom or ways? And here we are but in the early days of our birth and being. We must walk by faith.

Yet so can we only walk by believing it is not all dark behind. Faith is the child of Hope, and rests upon an assurance of good things to come—that it is not all dark behind the cloud. And assuredly it is not dark; for the light we see *is* light, and an evidence of greater light beyond—yea, an eternal light, of which it is a portion; since the light we now have is the same in kind as that which is beyond and to come. And not only so, but this world is the germ, the factor, of the world which is to come. All worlds are made of the same elements. This, indeed, is a real and sure truth; yet it is one which, though ever present in the heart of man, and known to every man who thinks and will examine himself, lies dormant until a man, awakened by the call of the Father, recognises his place. Then, realising what he is, and the elements out of which he is made, he passes from death unto life, from time into eternity. Such are the sons of God, and of such is the kingdom of Heaven. That kingdom and its laws are revealed in Christ. Christ is the revelation of that kingdom, and the way to it. And

so it is said, "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." We become sons, that is, by laying hold of the life of Christ. And so it is eternal life to lay hold of Christ. Yet few in this life seem to do so. Men can live without doing so: most men seem, indeed, to live so. But how different is life when the revelation of what it is comes to us! We lay hold of it in Christ. Then it comes to us as a reality: then it comes to us with power. How different a life, and how much better a life! How different when man lives not for or by himself, but for and by a Father! How different when man lives not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth from the mouth of God, when every act, and gift, and circumstance, is taken as from the hands of a wise and loving Father! A lily was, no doubt, as sweet before, but yet how much sweeter when we know whence it comes! So it is with whatever is seen as given us by the hand of a Father. It is not, then, one bush alone which burns with fire, but every bush burns with heavenly fire, and is seen as full of the glory of

God.* Thus we have not only one Eucharist—though that of bread and wine is ever first, as that whereby God drew most nigh to man—but all the world is filled with the glory of God, and transubstantiated into His presence; all the universe becomes sacramental and vocal throughout its height and depth. God no longer is hidden from man by what man has called Nature, but Nature in all her forms and powers is seen full of the being and character of God; and instead of being unable to find God for Nature, man is unable to find Nature for God.

How different is the world and the universe to a man whose eyes have thus been opened! Others see at sunrise a golden orb emerging from the sea; he too sees this, but hears also an innumerable company of angels praising God! This is what Christ came to give us when He came to manifest the nature of God, and to dispel the darkness of the world by filling it with the light of His presence. This light has come into the world, and the world can never be again as it was before. Let us distinguish it. Let us

* Blake.

keep it pure, by keeping Christ pure, and having by Him the spirit of love. Let us not be in the Father's house without seeing the Father, or look into the heavens without finding Him there. Christ, in revealing the Father, fills Heaven and earth with the character of His presence, thus giving us a key to His works everywhere and always. He tells us that what is ought to be, and that if we are as we ought to be we shall see this; and again, that by seeing this we shall be as we ought to be. He gives us to see heights beyond our earthly levels, and shining mountain-tops afar off, where before there was darkness. He does for us in the spiritual world what astronomers have done in the material, giving us data whereby we may find that which as yet has not come into vision. Christ goes before our spirits, showing them what, without Him, we could not find. In and through Him we find worlds otherwise unrealised, things not seen as yet, and some not yet born, but to be born and seen in the fulness of time. We, believing, wait for them. Christ is our pledge and proof. He says that we shall

see greater things than any which now we see. Now we are but at the beginning of things, children playing by the shore, before whom lies a great ocean still unexplored. We have the compass in His love. But how little of that have we as yet fathomed! Even in our high things here we have as yet been but very low. The very point of His own manifestation is missed by most of us. The worship of the King of Glory has generally been as if His glory were the opposite of what it is.

> "Many, if God would make them kings,
> Might not disgrace the throne He gave;
> How few, however, could fulfil
> The holier office of a slave."*

Let us not put the kingdom from us by misapprehending its nature, and by relegating to the future that which must be here to be at all, which in some sort must be ours here to be ours hereafter, and which cannot be ours without our being aware of it. The future kingdom is made out of the present, the kingdom of God to come out of that which now is. In kind

* Proctor.

both are the same. The kingdom is simply the becoming partakers of the Divine nature. It is, and is to be, within us; for it consists in having fellowship with the Father through Christ Jesus. That fellowship is one in spirit and truth—a holy spirit, a meek spirit, ever ready to minister rather than to be ministered unto, and to give one's self a ransom for others. This is the spirit of Christ, and it is written on the forehead of all His children and brethren. It is their life and happiness. Bearing about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus, they overcome by the love of Christ, the same love which was in Christ their Saviour and Redeemer. This is their nature, because His. It is the Divine nature, that by which the worlds were made and are sustained. We must rise to it, live by it, overcome by it; else, seizing and destroying, instead of living by and waiting in faith, we shall be ourselves overcome. Amen.

## IX.

## THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. I.

"Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions."—PSALMS xcix. 8.

THESE words give us the key to much which is often mysterious in the Divine government. God, they tell us, forgives, but takes vengeance on our inventions. What is the meaning of this? No doubt that God governs as a Father, that as such He corrects, but only to heal, not to destroy; that He forgives, but that His forgiveness often takes the form of a medicine. God, says our text, forgives, but takes vengeance on our inventions; or, as the Prayer Book version has it, "punishes" our inventions. God, that is, governs by law, by law enforced by penalty, by law which is good, and of which penalty is a portion. He does not dispense with law, or with penalty when required to

secure the enforcement of law; for both are good, and both are necessary. God puts his creatures under the operation of law, wise and beneficent law. If the laws are violated they avenge themselves on their violators, as when it is said, "God takes vengeance on their inventions." We must understand aright the use here of the word "vengeance." It is a human word which cannot be justly applied to the Divine actions without some explanation. It has no sense of vindictiveness; it does not mean that God steps in by some arbitrary act to punish, taking vengeance in the human sense of the word. It simply means that if men violate the law God leaves the law to avenge itself. It is a benevolent law. God does not interfere to stop its operation. He allows (as we say) "the law to take its course." In this way He punishes our inventions. At the same time He is forgiving them. It is ever in His heart to bless; but this is the way He conducts His blessing. He made the law to bless. For what other object can God have but our good? He is ever blessing. But this is the way

wherein His blessings work. He gives us seeds with different results, good and bad. He tells what are their results. He gives us a choice in sowing, and He allows us to reap the fruit of the seed we sow. Thus He teaches and instructs us. Thus only can we be taught. It is needful for our teaching that the law should operate according to its nature. In no other way could we discern good from evil; in no other way should we know that God and His laws are good. He teaches us what to choose and what to refuse. He forgives, but He does not dispense with penalty, or allow the sense of forgiveness to be felt too soon. He allows the creature to reap of the seed it sows, and when the lesson is learnt He takes the creature to His bosom. It was in His bosom before; it is always in His bosom; but it does not know that it is in His bosom until it knows that He and His laws are good, and cleaves to them. Then it has rest.

Life, in short, is an education—an education at the hands of an almighty but loving Schoolmaster, against whom there is no appeal, whose

laws are unalterable, whose purposes must be accomplished, but whose purposes, as His nature is, are good. This will be self-evident to us if we recognise that God is good, for we shall then know that God, in giving us being, had no purpose but our *well*-being, that He could have no purpose in our creation but our good. He did not require us. He was not obliged to make us. In fact the goodness of God breaking forth into a desire to communicate good was the sole first cause of the creation, as it is the only rational explanation of its continuance. If creation took its origin in love, it is evident that to all eternity God can have no thought or intent towards His creatures but to communicate good to them. If this was His first it must be His eternal attitude to His creatures. God's first motive in creation must ever be His mind towards it, for what God once is He always is. Being perfect He does not and cannot change, but always wills and is that which He willed and was at first. He must ever will and act in accordance with His nature, and His nature is that of love.

"God is love," says St. John; and our reason and conscience both confirm the saying. Were it not so—with all reverence be it spoken—God would not Himself be. Being love, He gave birth to creation. A creation was inevitable; for some object is ever requisite beyond self on which love can be exercised and overflow. Having given it birth, He is ever feeding it with food convenient for it. He is ever pressing it on unto perfection.

He has given birth to creatures of intelligent and moral natures, gifted with free will, able to choose and to refuse, to return or deny the love which He pours out upon them. Such only, indeed, in any true sense, are moral beings. Such only can truly give Him any adequate response. He is engaged in perfecting such. Having choice, it is inevitable that at times they choose amiss. He does not cast them off, but deals with them as they require and deserve. He gives them that they need—time—and the fruit of the seed they sow, the result of the choice they make, sweet crop from sweet seed, bitter crop from bitter seed. Thus He trains

and teaches. Life is an education. If we observe the providential government of man by God in history, if we watch it within ourselves, if we study it in what are called the laws of nature, we shall see that God's treatment of men, both as nations and as individuals, is to this end, and is influenced by these principles; and if we take it to the light of revelation, we shall see more clearly still that this is the method and nature of the Divine government.

God, in short, is governing in accordance with His own nature. As that nature was in the beginning, it is now, and ever shall and must be, and God's acts are in accordance with that nature. That nature is love, and all God's providence must be interpreted by this key. History is full of proofs that it is so. The history of man, from Adam to Jesus, is full of proofs in this direction, and still more have we proof that it is so in the life and death of Jesus Himself. From Adam's sin until the resurrection of Jesus we have nothing but manifestations of the love of God providing for the well-being and progress of humanity. God is seen in the ordi-

nary history of man, educating man to reject the evil and to choose the good. He is seen by the operations of ordinary law effecting the removal of sin and imperfection from His moral creation, teaching man's free will to choose the good without compulsion, and so to enter into rest. He marks his path at every step with flowers or thorns, as is need. But more especially do we see this as the principle of the Divine government in the history of revelation. When man, yielding to the frailty of his nature, sinned and fell, we have nothing but astounding proofs of God's superintending love and care, from Abraham to Moses, and so on until it culminates in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. But in Christ we have God not only forgiving, yet acting out the principle of our text, but making the principle so prominent and irreversible that in its operations He even does not spare Himself. In Christ He makes Himself the great example of its meaning and its permanence. Here He takes the penalty on Himself: He suffers for men, magnifying the law, and leading men to follow

Him in His steps, magnifying the law even when He Himself is put under the wheels of its penalty. He comes into the lot of man, and accepts the conditions which man is under. In Jesus we see Him forgive sin, but it is not by dispensing with penalty—for as sin reigned from Adam to Moses, so it reigns from Christ until now—but by taking the penalty of our sin upon Himself, showing man to what sin leads, and leading man out of it and penalty itself, by lifting him up into a higher and better world, where penalty is not needed, because sin is no more, into doing the will of the Father from knowing the Father, into accepting all things which He gives, by knowing that they are good from knowing Him. He causes man to know God, and God as love, by the tremendous proof and pledge He gives of it in doing this thing, in letting in forgiveness through the sacrifice of Himself—that is, showing us God in such a way as to reconcile us to God. Is it a mystery to us that such things should be needed, and that such a creation should be? No doubt there is a mystery. But there is no mystery in it to love.

Those who love will see that a creation should be, and such as this, and that redemption follows, and as it is in Christ. The creature is fallible, and falls. Love interposes to lift it up. It does so at its own cost. If the fall is inevitable—as no doubt it is to creatures gifted with free will (and what other creatures could satisfy God?)—so is their restoration; for God is love. Does this character and condition take from God? Is the father worse, whose son sins against him, who forgives him, and suffers ere he can forgive him? A forgiveness which condemns the sinner exalts the Saviour.

A creature of limited intellect can only be taught by experience, and if his will is corrupt he can only be reconciled to law by unity with the Lawgiver, by realising that a law must be good which flows from one who is good. The proof is given in the life and death of Christ—a proof of love, a proof that law and its penalties are good. God does not change His laws even for His beloved Son. He subjects Him to their operation, and He also submits Himself to it, and says to men, "Be ye reconciled unto

God." Christ magnifies the law. He reconciles us to the Lawgiver. He submits Himself to suffering and death as the wages of man's sin. He does so with painful loss to Himself. He shows men His hands and His side pierced for them — pierced by the inevitable operation of law —and He bids men follow in His steps. He says there is no exemption from law, yet no arbitrary punishment, nothing but working for good. 'Be ye reconciled to law; be one with me, the head and fountain of law, one with me and my law, and then it will be well with you, well with both of us, God and man, and in loving reverence; otherwise, it is ill, and will be ill, ever growing worse.' The soul fighting with law, and away from law and its source, is desolate, is in everlasting destruction, is alone, alone off the line, living on its own flesh. Do we think that the sin of Adam was too severely punished? How could his punishment have been less? What did he do? He ran off the line of good. He took the fruit of a forbidden tree; it had no juice but its own. No other fate, no other consequence, could

have followed. Law is invariable. We cannot give one consequence to the cause of another. We cannot give to the seed of one tree the fruit of another. We must submit to the ordinances of God from feeling that it is good to do so—submit from feeling that it is joy to do so. If we know that our lives and their circumstances are given and directed by the hand of God, it is well with us. If we see that all their arrangements are apportioned by Him, and given either as cordials to strengthen or punishments to bear, as we require, then it is well with us, and will be well. Thus only can we take punishment, which never is remitted; thus only can we get out of punishment, by rising into the region where punishment is unknown, because its lessons are not required from our being at one with God and His laws—one with God, and ever living on Divine food. For to this does God call us, and to nothing else—to be one with Himself. Such place and honour has He called us to, for "the manner of the love" which the Father has bestowed on us is to call

us His sons, nothing other and nothing less! Realising this, should we not live as sons? Should we not take everything as from the hand of God? So doing, it would be well with us; we should overcome the world, and be delivered from all fear and evil. "For there is no real ill to one in such a case, as there is no real evil in life but that which arises from absence from God. There is no true sorrow to that man whose face is really turned to God; no misery in the world, nothing which makes either life or death full of calamity, but blindness and insensibility—insensibility to God and His laws. Everything which has in it aught of the nature of evil or distress may be traced to this source. For if a man knows that he comes into this world on no other errand but to rise out of time and its hindrances into eternity and its freedom, if he govern his inward thoughts and outward actions by this view of himself, every day loses its evil; prosperity and adversity have no difference, for he receives and uses them both as part of the one way, and in the one spirit. Thus life and

death are equally one, welcome because parts of the same road, the way of eternal life. Poor and miserable as this life often is, yet we have all of us free access at all times to all that is great and good and happy, and ever carry within ourselves a key to all the treasures which Heaven has to bestow. Do we not too often, then, starve in the midst of plenty, and groan under infirmities when a remedy is in our hands? Too often we live and die without knowing or feeling anything of the true, the real, and the one only good, whilst we have the power to know and to enjoy it in our hands; for no doubt we might feel the powers of Heaven within us as much as we do the powers of this world without; for Heaven (or the kingdom of the Spirit) is as near to our souls as the earth is to our bodies; and we were created and are redeemed to have our conversation there. God, the only good of all intelligent and moral natures, is not an absent or distant good, but is ever present. 'In Him we live and move and have our being, and at any time we are only strangers to Heaven, and without God in

the world, for this reason, that we will not give ourselves to them."*

We do not look where we can find, or do not look at all. Every man, more or less, lives in a dream, every man in his own particular dream —living, that is, in some particular way which takes up all his thoughts and acts, unconscious of the great highway and world which lies beside him, of which his dream is no part, on which he is not walking, and is therefore perishing from the right way. For the eternity which is before such an one, and in which, in fact, he now is, is no part of such a life and way. The eternal life, of which we are bid to lay hold, is not this life; such an one, therefore, is losing time and eternity both. The short-sighted life which he is living has neither fruit here nor root beyond; it is only temporary and full of trouble. The true life can only be had by seeking and finding what the will of the Lord is, and conforming ourselves thereto. This is the object

* From the Rev. W. Law's "Spirit of Prayer," as is a previously quoted passage—a book, as all Mr. Law's works, far too little known in our days.

of our birth here, and God's purpose in it. As we choose we have. We may have an eternal life with God, or an eternal death with the fallen angels; and we are fitting ourselves for the one or for the other, just as we are here seeking and finding the will of God, or seeking and finding our own. God desires, and is arranging for, the first; He hates, and is trying to prevent, our choosing the other. He attaches prizes to the one and penalties to the other, joy to a true choice and sorrow to a false. He gives us exercises that we may choose. He gives prizes, He gives penalties, He tells us when we err, He seeks to deter us from again erring. He takes vengeance on our inventions. Would we that it were not so, and that there were no penalties? We read of men in intoxication falling asleep by a fire, and not aware that their limbs had been burnt off until they came to themselves. Would we like it to be so with us, and that our souls were lost because no pain had been attached to transgression? Is God more or less good because of inflicting penalty, because this is the method of the Divine go-

vernment? Surely more. God is love, and God is one. His dealings are ever regulated by the same principles; from the same Fountain proceedeth not sweet water and bitter. If the water seem bitter, it is medicinal. God forgives; but He "will by no means clear the guilty"—that is, never allows sin to be a light thing. It would not be love were He so to do. It is right; it is inevitable. If it is ruinous in physical or mechanical law, transgression is equally so in spiritual or moral. God, therefore, never dispenses with penalty as its cure. Even the restoration of man in Christ does not dispense with penalty, as we have seen. The sentence on Adam of death, as the wages of sin, is still fulfilled, we know, to the letter. Death still reigns, and death must and will reign so long as sin reigns. But the promise to Adam is not forgotten. God has not failed in His promise. Only it is fulfilled not by the abolishing of penalty, but in a more excellent way, by the bringing in of a higher life by death, "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death"—that is, by Christ's death

wean man from transgression, and so abolish penalty and death for ever. Christ vanquishes death by dying, and putting an end to sin brings in an everlasting righteousness.

God forgives, but He cures by penalty. His forgiveness takes the form of remedy, and that one often of pain; but it is needful for our good. Thus it is, because He knows it is needed. It is needed for the creature's good. Sin is self-destructive. It is made so by God—by God, who loves us as none other can, and knows us as none other does. He made us, and not we ourselves. He is far from despising or forgetting the work of His own hands. There is none nearer, let there be none dearer to us, than God. No one can understand or enter into our states like God, none do so much for us, none feel so much. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself," He says. Yes, when we think that there is none hearing or caring, God is hearing and caring for us. He heard the Israelites in Egypt, and brought them out with a mighty hand.

We are tried and chastised, we say. Yea, *He*

tries and chastises; it is He who does so. But He has an end in view, a good and a high end. If we understood and believed this, we should have rest upon the way. It is a long way, a long education, that for eternal glory and joy. We see not the end—we scarce see the way. We are impatient because our time is limited. "But," says King David, "it is mine own infirmity. I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." He remembered God's eternity, His seeing the end of things. We are so impatient, so hurried, because our time is short; so blind, because we can see but little of the way. But it is not so with God. He sees the end from the beginning; He has the end in view, and is arranging for it. He is therefore not hurried. Let us remember this, and wait upon God, seeking His way, taking what He sends us, trying to understand its meaning, and to receive it into ourselves; and it will be well with us. So shall we get out of impatience, of fear, of despair; so the night will lead to the morning, and the winter to the spring; and as in the night we rest, and in the winter the

spring buds are being formed, and as it is the cutting and friction which make the brilliancy of the diamond, so it is, and will be, with us, and therefore it is that often we are so sorely tried, and touched where we are most sensitive; for the will of God is our perfection, and that all should shine as the stars.

But at times we have hard thoughts of God. A little one has hard thoughts of his father when he takes him into a room to punish him. He thinks there is no reason, nothing which might not be forgiven without chastisement, nothing which words or exhortation would not put right. He wonders, perhaps, at the hardness of his father's heart, how he could be so cruel. Yet, did he see the cause, and the end of the chastisement, he would cease to wonder. And did man see the hardness of his own heart, the progress of iniquity within himself, the misery of the end to which it is bringing him, and the inevitable destruction to which sin leads; did he see how clearly his Father (and that a Divine Father) knows this, and the end to which correction will bring, the noble character which it will

produce, which would not be his without its aid; did he know and believe that every pang inflicted goes to the Father's heart, that "in all our afflictions He is afflicted," even as Jesus weeps over Lazarus, whom He is about to raise;—he would be at rest and accept the ways of God, and believe that He doeth all things well, that affliction is needed, that God does right in appointing it, and that, while forgiving sinners, it is best that at the same time He should punish their inventions, so that they may know the right way, and that there is but one right, and that the way of God—of God who has and can have no other end in the government of His creatures but their good, in believing and realising which they would have peace, closing with His will, and saying, "Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire in comparison of thee." "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." The highest end is no doubt the intended destiny of the creature; to which may

all, in God's infinite mercy, come through the grace and method which is in Christ Jesus!

God punishes our inventions until we find that they are inventions and not the true way of life; until we find that the life of the flesh, however natural it may be to a lower creature, is not the proper life for one formed in and capable of the image of God; that the life of the flesh, when it is—as, alas, it too often is—carried out by a man beyond the lines of the beasts that (as we are apt to say) perish, set in opposition to the law of God or the spirit of true life, has and can have but one end, viz., destruction; and that punishment must remain on sin until the true life be chosen—an ordinance evidential of the wise and just and loving character of the government of God. Let us understand and choose this, and count the time past of our life more than sufficient to have wrought the will of the flesh. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come," they invite and say that all things are now ready. May we also be ready, and say, "Come, Lord Jesus," come quickly, take away my own will, and give me

Thine; the will which took the Father's way, and found it good because it was the Father's. Yes, the Regenerator and Liberator of the spirit, Jesus, in His sacrifice of Himself, shows us the true way. He bears our iniquities and carries our sorrows, and by His stripes we are healed. He reconciles us to the will of God, whatever it may be, showing us that it is good, because from God; showing us that when penalty falls on the innocent man—as often it does on those who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, mixed up, as we all are, one with another, so that our vices and virtues cannot but affect our neighbours—the will of God is good, and to be accepted as ours, and the cup drunk, even if we ourselves have not mixed it, to be taken because given by Him. Following this path we shall infallibly prosper, and be ever victorious. When sin abounds, grace we shall find is yet too much for it, evil ever being overcome with good; for evil is not eternal, and ever yields before grace. Taking our nature and becoming our Head, Christ will efface the old Adam in us, if we

will allow Him. And so mighty is love, and so different the ends of the two natures, that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive"—all who tread in His steps, all who accept the wages of sin as due, and take God's punishments with His forgiveness, His vengeance in His pardon, seeing the face of the Father equally in both, and saying in them both:—"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "Abba, Father." "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." Amen.

## X.

## THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. II.

"I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmer-worm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me."—AMOS iv. 9.

IN this verse we have some further glimpses of the object and method of the Divine government; that it is conducted on principles which achieve their end by laws and methods which convey their sanctions within themselves, while still it is God Himself who both gives and controls these laws. That the laws are good, even when they are most severe in their operation, we are bound to believe, not only from the necessity of their being in consonance with the character of God Himself, but because their object is correction, not destruction. God rules by law, and from the operation of His laws there is no

discharge; but the object is good, and, therefore there ought to be no discharge. God's object is not to remove penalty from sin—that is, suffering from transgression; His object is to raise us above penalty, by giving us unity and fellowship with His laws and Himself—above the region where penalty can come in.

It is said in our text, "I have smitten thee." God does not separate Himself from His laws. Blasting and mildew act by law; still it is God who is the operator. He is one, or at one, with His laws. He does not suspend them because they are one with Himself; they are good, and He is the maintenance of all that is good. He is unchangeable; therefore, if there is change, it is not change in Him, but in the creature, which, falling out of law and good, creates disturbance, which is rectified by an avenging law. The rectification is often accomplished with pain and suffering, the concomitants of the broken law; by mildew and of canker; but the end is one, although the operation varies, and is painful or pleasurable as the case may be, but always good as being from God.

We cannot doubt that if God be good His laws are good; for they must be in accordance with Himself and His own nature. We cannot doubt that creation began in good, and that as it began so it must continue: for God is unchangeable. What God is, that He always is; and that which He is, revelation, reason, and our own hearts tell us to be one thing; which is love. God need not and would not have gone out of Himself to create, had not this been the case. He created and creates from one motive; and He must ever continue in the same aspect and relation to His creation throughout eternity. "God" (as well says William Law, from whom again we borrow) "is an unbeginning, never-ending, never-ceasing, and ever-flowing ocean of love." "All this creation, through its height and depth, in all its variety of working and power, is but a manifestation of the invisible power, glory, and goodness of the Creator, or God becoming sensible or visible in His works. All the multitude of creatures, in their infinite variety, degrees, and capacities, are only so

many speaking figures and living forms of the manifold riches and power of God—so many sounds, voices, shows, and exhibitions of that Divine Being whose love gave birth and life to all of them. Every creature now and throughout eternity has its place and form only to manifest, and rejoice in some share of, the love and happiness and goodness of the Deity. This is the one will and work of God in and through creation. From the beginning to the end it is the same. As He began in love, He must continue in love to the end. He can never will or intend anything towards His creatures, in them or by them, but only communications of His own goodness and felicity. This is the unchangeable nature and disposition of God."

There are no meaningless providences with God. He is ever acting for the well-being of His creature. When His intelligent offspring violates law, He deals with it by the operation of remedial law, as it requires. God often has, therefore, to rectify and to raise His creature by the introduction of remedies and stimulants, which are accompanied with pain, to set their

dislocations and to remove spiritual diseases which would end in apathy and death. This is the explanation of much of His dealing, which at times terrifies and alarms us both as to individuals and nations. We should examine such cases, and endeavour to see and to profit by the meaning. Often, too, Divine Providence has to arouse us to the fact of there being something beyond ourselves and the ordinary routine, as we term it, of nature, by signs and startling occurrences, lest we fall down to the belief that there is nothing beyond ourselves. Our text, which sets forth a condition of old similar to that which is now present in some neighbouring nations, points in the same direction. We should look for and find the meaning of these dealings. If we do not, and do not see the hand of God in them, we shall be apt to fall either into recklessness or despair.

The Prophet Amos tells us that such things are in the providence of God, and he shows us the meaning of these judgments of God, explaining that, however dreadful they seem, their meaning is good and not evil; that they

are for correction, and not destruction:—"I have smitten you with blasting and mildew . . . . yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord." The meaning of the visitation was restoration—a restoration of health and unity; in short, the well-being of God's intelligent creation. God acted thus to awaken, to arouse, to amend, and to elevate it, so that it should attain a sufficient, safe position. Man is to become partaker of the Divine nature. To effect this, God sends messengers suited to the work, to break down that which is evil, to drive it out, to strengthen the good, and to invigorate the soul, until it rises into its true image—the height, after its measure, of the Divine likeness. And how much is needful too often ere this can be effected, until the poor creature is driven out of its sad self to take refuge in God, which yet is its highest privilege and greatest possession! Often He has to place the creature in painful positions to effect this end. He makes it "subject to vanity"—that is, He gives it to know what emptiness is, what mere trust in self is, until it is drawn out of this to have faith in Him. God

deals with the soul as a good physician does with the body. Nay, at times, He becomes to it a consuming fire. He brings His laws of fire and blasting to bear upon it. He orders bitter and sour, as well as cordials. He calls into operation unpleasant things, as does the earthly physician. He orders them for our benefit and improvement. He does so from love; because He is love, He is good, and never more good than in doing this. He is unchangeable. It would be a change for the worse were He to do other than this—a change impossible with God. He suits His measures to the need. He has health for the result. He gives greater or less amount of medicine, as greater or less is required. At first He begins with lesser, but if greater be needed He does not hesitate to send it, ever having one object in view, the well-being of the patient. God does not, so to speak, come into direct and arbitrary dealing; step by step He employs instruments, agents, means; although, as He Himself is not severed from these, it is true in all cases that it is God Himself who is acting. All the elements of

nature are only so many outward materials in the hands of God, formed and mixed into heat or cold, into fruitful or pestilential effects; into the serenity of the sunshine or blasting tempests; into means of health or sickness, of plenty or poverty, just as the wisdom and goodness of God sees to be most fit for man, and most suited for raising his earthly into a heavenly condition. Therefore we read that "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," chasteneth that he may become a partaker of His holiness. His tender mercies are over all His works; but they are expressed in different ways, and often, to us, do not seem tender. He uses the elements of nature as the infirmities of all His creatures, and of man particularly, require. It is Omnipotent love doing all which is required for fallen man to restore him, just as a kind and watchful earthly parent or physician does with his son or patient.

Sometimes we doubt this, because we do not see the end; if we saw the end, we should not doubt. Neither should we sin, and act so as to require the mildew and palmer-worm, did we

know or remember what God is doing, and what His objects ever are. Sodom is cut down in its sins, and the world before Noah perishes, and Pharaoh is drowned in the Red Sea; but all this, we may be sure, was to save them from a deeper destruction, and to prevent worse calamities. And so says the Psalmist: "Thou, Lord, art *merciful*, for Thou rewardest every man according to his work." (Ps. lxii. 12, Prayer Book Version). He ever gives to man the fruit of the seed he sows, that man may learn to sow good seed.

We have gained a great step in spiritual things, and in knowledge of the method of the Divine government, when we have come so far as this; a great step towards the regulation of our own lives—a step, too, towards peace and safety; and we are on the way to the true life. While we see that the words of our text are full of terrible things, yet we see that God has no will in them but to bless fallen man, by doing such things as will turn him from iniquity. This He is equally doing whether He turns the air into a pestilence, or makes it rain down manna

—for both are equally done for the same purpose of blessing, suited to the time, place, and occasion—so that man may come to God, and rise out of the evil and misery of sin. The experience of our lives teaches us that such is the purpose of God; the testimony of the oldest, the best, and wisest, says that it is so; and the declarations of Holy Scripture in a thousand places confirm the experience. But above all it is sealed to us as a fact—and shown to be infinitely true that love is at the bottom of it all—in the life and death of Christ, the anointed Saviour.

In the astonishing proof of God's love and wisdom, which we have in Christ and His work, we are lost in awe and reverence; and this the more that we consider it. Yet is this but another though deeper form of that same love which meets us in a thousand shapes in every turn of life—in light and darkness, in day and night, fire and water, in storm and tempest, all of which in their various ways are a fulfilling of God's love. In all the aspects of nature the supernatural deity is willing and seeking but

the restoration and reunion of man's fallen nature with Himself. All the bitters of our cup, we may be sure, are under the charge of a skilful and loving Physician, of a wise and careful Teacher, who is educating us for eternity. We are in the bosom of a good Shepherd, who says that rather He Himself than his little ones should perish. He who made the earth, and "hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand," knows no doubt how to carry *us* in safety, and is able to do so. The Great Husbandman knows what is needed, and prunes his vine as it requires, that it may yield more fruit. And He does this Himself. He uses means, no doubt, but it is He Himself who uses them. He appoints no deputy who is not under His own eye, because no deputy is sure or tender enough to be trusted. God would bring us very near unto Himself, and His dealings are therefore searching and close; and, as much true humility is needful for coming close to God, so He teaches us first to know how we can only have it by recognising, that is, by receiving. Humility is the first step to grow rich. We must first realise

our own emptiness, and that we are but creatures, ere we can be filled with the fulness of God. Let us ever remember what we really are, and receive God's dealings with awe and reverence, and then we shall be in the way to greater things. Let us remember that we are but the children of a day, and that His years are from eternity to eternity; that thence He makes us and sees us, and has our paths before Him—our beginning and our end. Let us not then fret, nor weary, nor repine. All this is an undervaluing and accusing of God. Does He not know and feel for our needs? Are not all our lives, our ways, our wants, our desires, our sorrows, ever before Him? Does he not feel? He says, 'I saw thy attempt to serve me—that feeble attempt. True, it failed: but I take the will for the deed.' "Fear not," He says; "I am with thee." "Fear not, thou worm Jacob"—that is, 'Though you feel as creatures of the dust, yet be strong in me; I the Lord gave you birth; you are mine; your origin is Divine. You are my children; I am your everlasting Father; and I am with you.' No doubt, the

way is often hard, and the world a wilderness to us. But here we are to receive indispensable lessons — indispensable, and not to be learnt elsewhere. True, they are elementary, but yet needful lessons. This is the school in which our Father has placed us—our first school, the rudimentary school. If we could do without it, we should not be here. If we could be taken at once to Heaven, we should be; but Heaven is attained by degrees, and we must have a beginning. Heaven is but the product of life —of a life of training and education, of choosing the good and refusing the evil. It cannot otherwise be got; it does not otherwise exist.

We are here that we may have it; this is our first stage. God puts us here mid rough and rude elementary temporary things, only that we may rise out of them, yet by means of them, into another and higher condition, into which, for creatures such as we are, these things lead. Here we are on the way; here we know good and evil, but as yet we have not chosen the good. We are in God's hand to learn to do so. This is God's world, and we are

here to learn a lesson. We are here for a purpose, and when that is accomplished we shall be taken hence. We are not to rest here. We cannot do so, even when the world seems good. It is transitory; we must seek the eternal. Like Abraham, although in a land of promise, in a country which is God's, we yet must look to something more—another and better country beyond; a higher inheritance; a city which hath foundations—that is, to God Himself. We are but on a road; it is transitory; this is a wilderness; but, depend upon it, no one will be able to say throughout eternity that he was a moment longer in the wilderness than there was need for.

Let us not despond. Despondency is ever an undervaluing of God. Why should we doubt? Are we not God's offspring, the creatures of His hands? He made us, and not we ourselves; cannot we believe that He is taking care, and will take care, of us? Surely He is able, surely He is willing, to give us all things for which we have capacity. And how great is that capacity! For has He not made us in the likeness of Him-

self—our Father and our God? Is not this enough? To this He is bringing us by every needful means—and all means are in His power—but we are not judges of the necessary means. "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me," says the Psalmist; "give me understanding, that I may learn Thy commandments." And is He not giving us understanding? But how can this be done save through experience of the nature of things? Accordingly, by His Providence, by His word, by His cloud, by His sunshine, by the world's opposition, by our losses and by our crosses, by our hopes and fruitions, He teaches; He ever goes on teaching; and, blessed be His name, He will go on until the end be accomplished—the good end; for no time can alter His relationship and His goodwill towards us; we can never cease to be His children, or He our Father. Beyond doubt He is our Father; He is our true Father. God is our Father, and whatever is meant by that name. He is to us a Father, and a perfect Father—a Father everlasting, ever a Father. As He was in the beginning, He is now, and ever shall be, in the same

relation to us. Life, death, can make no alteration in this relationship. In life, at death, after death, He is equally the same, and our Father. Yea, even beyond the shores of death we do not go unto a strange country, for our Father still is there, and we are in our Father's house; we go to God, who will deal with us still as a Father, in whatever we require, whatever that may be. No time, no space, can destroy this relationship. Surely it is life and health, victory and eternal life, to believe this. Just as we believe this we have victory and life, and as we fall out of this belief we perish. This is the Catholic faith; may we cherish it as our hope, our strength. It is our refuge in the day of trouble, and our only security in our day of joy, that God is our Father, not giving us our deserts, but what our nature requires. It is true that we are sinners, and sin debars us from nearness to God. Sin is hateful unto God, if not to us. Most true it is that God hates sin, and is separate from it. Yet He does not hate *us*. He loves ourselves, though not our sin; and, because He loves us, He will cleanse us from sin. It is our hope

and trust, and now He is taking the means to it, whatever means are required.

Here indeed we are often long in the wilderness, because we are slow to learn the true good. But even here—and surely when we remember who put us here there is everything to assure us—the everlasting arms are around us; and what want we more? In all dark and rough places a loving eye is ever over us, and a loving heart near, and a helping hand. But it is everything to know and to realise this. It makes no difference in the fact, but it makes every difference to our mental condition. And therefore it is that the Gospel is preached unto us. Knowledge does not alter the facts of life or remove our trials; but it gives us that which enables us to triumph over circumstances, and takes the sting out of trial, when it is such knowledge as is contained in the Gospel. There God manifests what He is, and seals Himself to us as God, by a seal of which, though we may reject it, we cannot deny the meaning. He gives us to know Himself in Christ, and by this knowledge puts into our hands the victory over all things. In

Christ He says, "Behold me! behold me!" "Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side;" "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" If the water of your life is bitter, believe that it is medicinal. To this all the wounds of Christ cry out, "Amen." It is everything to realise this. All things thus acquire their true value—our blessings and what we call our curses—our blessings valued as a way to something higher and better, and our curses as but pricks and goads to hasten us to a better inheritance. We have to realise that life is an education, conducted for us by a wise and loving God, and also that it is more than an education—that it is the thing itself for which the education is intended and given, namely, participation in the holy and, because holy, blessed nature of our God.

What we have mainly to learn is to enter into the purposes of God, to realise the mind of God, especially as to sin; that as to sin, we are to be ever against it, and ever in sympathy with holiness and God; that we are ever to have fellow-

ship with the Father, and that if we have the mind of Christ we shall have this fellowship. Alas! how long we are in realising the true nature of sin or the true nature of the Father; that sin is a disease destructive of ourselves, which, if unchecked, would destroy creation; and that to understand this we must have the mind of Christ! Little do any of us know what is the meaning of sin; none of us but as he enters into the spirit of Christ, the spirit of the Son of God. Could we enter into its meaning by entering into its power, as when in the hiding of the Father's face it elicited from Him the bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" we should come to regard it with greater fear and loathing than we do. Could we regard its relations as being to the soul that which a cancer is to the body, our first prayer would no doubt ever be, "Search me, O God, and try my heart, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Could we see it as the Psalmist saw it when he cried, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because men keep not Thy law;"

could we feel the real meaning and power of it, as summed up in one of the pitying tears of Jesus at Jerusalem, or at the grave of Lazarus with the sisters, we should be cured of light views regarding it, of dallying with it, of excusing it. Let us see to this. Looking at Christ upon the cross, we behold the wages of sin—how it enters there into the very soul, so to speak, of the Most High Himself. For however mysterious it may be that God should suffer, and however needful it was for the cankerworm and the locust to devour, so that man might be saved, the cross shows how terrible the process is, even to the Divine mind. If, I say, we studied and understood this, it would be well for us; well, if the iron of this teaching entered into our own souls; well, because the object of the teaching would be effected: we should be saved from sin, united to God, and filled with the peaceable fruits of righteousness; we should be at peace, and rejoice in God.

Happy are we if we are on this, the true path. For when once we realise the blessedness and peace of being at one with God, what a future is

before us! We are at the entrance of Heaven; "paradise is opening up before us with all its properties and powers, all the riches and glories of God Himself. God is ever making His creation to break forth, and spring up, and give new forms and revelations of His own goodness and beauty." * Then are we in the right way to see the manifold wonders of God, and have the key to their meaning and power; "we experience eternal apprehensions of sensations of the Divinity; we are able to see, and feel, and taste, and handle varied and ever new kinds of delight from an inexhaustible fountain of changing and never-ceasing wonders of Divine glory. An eternity of this is opening up—an eternity for which our souls were created. What are earthly ambitions compared to this? Let us bear with patience the rags of an inferior nature here, the veils and darkness of the fallen flesh, the lot of our inheritance as children of Adam, and take with gladness all God's methods of raising it up, thinking nothing worthy of a thought but that which will bring us

* Law.

soonest to the Divine fulfilment, and land us quickest and safest in the eternal mansions."*

Let us dwell in the mind and will of Christ; let us seek to apprehend that for which we were apprehended of Him—that we may "know Him" and have fellowship in His sufferings and conformity to His death, receiving all things as from the Father, even as He did, and counting them good because from Him, as sent for a good purpose, though not good in themselves; so that if any cup we fear and dislike be not taken away, it may be good in our sight, as in the sight of Him who said, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight"—good, if even as locusts, and mildew, and canker, if it have the effect, as was intended, of bringing and keeping us close to God. It is but the realisation that God's will should be done, and not our own; that His kingdom shall come, and His name be hallowed by every means needful which He sees right to adopt. Amen.

* Law.

## XI.

## THE GROUND OF HOPE.

"We are saved by hope."—ROM. viii. 24.

GOD'S government of the world is now going on; and it is good. We can only be saved by believing this. This world is as much under God's government as the next world. It is the same God; and the same government; and both are good. As a rule, we see every one rewarded according to his works. As a man sows he reaps. On the whole, life is a blessing here; and we cannot doubt that the course of God's government over all is good.

No doubt some evil men prosper, and sometimes vice is triumphant; and there are catastrophes—sudden and dreadful catastrophes, as when Lisbon was destroyed by an earthquake, and the *Northfleet* went down at her anchors,

and almost four hundred people in the one case, and forty thousand in the other, perished in a moment. But these things are not the rule; they are the exceptions. How many thousands of cottagers sleep securely for one king who is dethroned! How many ships sail safely for one which is cast away! These things—sudden catastrophes at any rate—are but the gathering into a focus of that which, spread out, ever exists. The sinking of the *Northfleet* gave no greater amount of sorrow and suffering than that which daily occurs within a week in a large city. But it was gathered into one point, and was therefore more appalling; yet even so, by the very interest it aroused, proving that suffering is the exception rather than the rule. And as to death, come when or how it may, it eventually swallows up all. Without it there would be no progress, no possibility of a better world, perhaps no true life.

But it will be said: 'Why make such a world at all?' Because it is good, and no doubt the only possible way to at least moral perfection.

'It is very easy to say all that, sitting on the shore, or in good health,' you may say; 'but it would be very different if you were going down in the ship or dying of disease.'

No doubt. But then comes in the Gospel to aid our observation of life in general. It teaches us (and the rule of God's good providence teaches us) to be so grounded and settled, when we are well, and safe on the shore, in the belief of the good character and providence of God, that when the evil days do come, as come they must, we may not be terrified or overcome by them; that we may not have to look for our weapons when the battle has begun.

God's providence and Christ's revelation both tell us that God is good, and that by means of believing this we may be saved; that by believing this we may be delivered at least from fear, and also gain that which otherwise would not have been ours. We are to be saved by hope, by faith, by trust that God is good, and ever doing good—not exceptionally, but as a rule. This is the main drift of our blessed Lord's teaching. In a certain sense it is true

that "one event happeneth to all," the providence of good not altering the laws of circumstance, and all having to come under the grave and gate of death. But that the government of God is good, is the main tenor of our blessed Lord's teaching. He ever appeals to the evident benignity of the general government of God, and discourages our arguing from exceptions or requiring miracles to raise a belief in God's goodness or favour. And truly if God be not recognised already by what He is, and in what we experience and are conscious of, it does not seem possible that He can be made known at all.

We must, therefore, settle ourselves in the firm belief of the goodness of the government of God, that when the evil days come we may be able from the heart to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." I do not mean that we should not pray; nor do I believe that by prayer we cannot alter anything in the government of God or the reign of law; I believe we can, and I believe we do. I think in this, however, we should always say, "If

it be possible," that is, "if it be good;" but as to what God does we should ever be at rest. As to the propriety and power of prayer we need surely go no farther than the example of our blessed Lord, who Himself prayed always. Whatever prayer can do or is, there can therefore be no question of its need and importance to a Christian. But apart from this, what we are to be saved by is TRUST, not by *having*, but believing. And this attitude is not one which is confined to this lower sphere, but is, and must be, the rule of all the spheres. Angels must live by and be saved by faith, just as men by the same means—the same kind of faith, though different in degree; for no creature can exhaust or comprehend all the ways and purposes of God; all creatures must live, therefore, and be saved in the same manner; that is, live by faith, and be saved by their belief in what God is; that He is good, that all His outgoings, whatever appearance they may at times assume to the contrary, must be good. In some sense this is the highest possible life, a higher life than that of sight, for it infers a higher confidence,

a more heroic dependence. "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed."

And yet faith is not the thing itself. It is but a means. There is something which is the object of faith, and that is the thing itself, and it is that for which we trust and hope; and the expectation of it is the cause of our faith and hope. What that is which we hope for will depend much upon our spiritual vision — the spiritual state, that is, wherein we are, and to which we have attained. Sight in some sort describes it, but is not the thing itself. Nor can mere sight give it—not, that is, in the highest sense. It may give again those we have loved and lost, but it cannot give those higher conditions of spiritual vision to which we feel we can attain, nor the very things we mean by our friends themselves. Nor can it give us Christ Himself. For of Him it may be said, as of the others in their degree, that we know not what we ask when it is sight we demand; for is not this but to know Him after the flesh? The vision must be internal as well as external; for when the Lord said He went away to prepare a

place for His disciples, His meaning was that time was required for the preparation of them to behold as well as of that which was to be beholden. As the eye must bring with it that with which it is to see in spiritual things, its preparation is requisite ere it can behold them. We see this daily. An unread man, for example, will see on the plains of Marathon some fields and hedges and surrounding hills; a scholar will see the Greeks and Persians, Miltiades and Artaphernes. And that heavenly kingdom, which Christ is gone to prepare and we are to see, requires as much preparation on the part of its heirs ere they can behold it as the natural and historical scenery. Christ is already come in a degree to some, and is seen now by them where two or three are gathered together in His name; and His presence is felt where in a Holy Communion His disciples are met together at His table. To others there is but the bread and wine; to the prepared eye there is the body and blood of the Lord—a spiritual presence spiritually discerned.

No doubt the second advent is also more than

this. But it is just that more which cannot be fully given us without the passage through the gate of death. Life on our part is but one long getting ready for this, and the agent of preparation is faith—faith in God as seen in ordinary nature, and as seen in the revelation by Christ. It is by the exercise of faith that the fitness and power come by which we are to, and now do, enter into the kingdom of God; which must and does consist, not in what He gives us but in what He is Himself, not in any aspect but in the fount from which the overflow comes. Faith saves us from fear of circumstances because it rests us on the foundation of all circumstances, and brings us into that which no circumstances can give or take away, that which is good in all we have, that which purifies it from what is evil, and, indeed, gives us the real from which the ideal flows. No doubt there is a progress by thus realising, and we come as we realise into higher visions of God, until our elementary faith seems to us but as the unreasoning faith of infants, good indeed so far as it goes, but only good when it is getting what

it wants, whereas the higher faith is equally good while we get not what we want, but by patience wait for it, and are saved by hope. And who —that has at all walked in this path and gone any way in it—has not felt not only that evil is overcome of good, but that the very evil itself has been turned into a blessing? Yet it is now and then a hard strain on faith. How often we have but the seed, and the crop is not seen; prayer vanishes in air; we sigh and have nothing. Our bread is cast upon the waters, and we do not find it again even after many days. We want those we have loved and lost—the absent, the estranged. If our lives are hid with Christ in God, Christ also seems hidden from us. Eighteen hundred years ago He was here, they say. They saw Him; we believe it; we have the words of His mouth. We quite apprehend all this. But yet we should like more—*our* eyes to behold Him, and not another. "To be with Christ is far better," surely? Yes, but the preparation? For He is not now altogether as He then was. He is to appear in *glory;* and to see Him as He is, we must be

prepared—be, in short, in the element wherein He is to appear; to see Him as He is, in a measure we must first be as He is. Much has to be done. He has gone "to prepare a place." But of what sort? It is not to be a scenic representation, a theatrical show; the spiritual world has no such sights and sounds. It is a realisation of the unseen and invisible in its roots and powers. He is to change our vile body that it may be made like His glorious body. The grave and gate of death are needful for us all, ere we burst from the worm and chrysalis state into the flying and aërial condition. Meanwhile, the new Jerusalem has not come, and we are to go to it. We are on the road; the way is faith, the way of hope. Eighteen hundred years of waiting have passed away, and the Church has grown by waiting. Its members have been saved by hope and faith. They did not here enter into the Celestial city, or walk on the Delectable mountains. But they saw them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and got glimpses of their friends there, and heard their voices, and had

many a vision of Christ Himself. This saved them; this, and their belief that the universe rolled on the wheels of God; that the chariot was driven by a true Governor; the road, it might be, dark and unknown to them at times, but the end good and sure—sure for them and others, from the character of Him who drove. In their ears was the everlasting chime of the towers of Heaven; in their eyes scintillations of the Divine glory, coruscations of the Eternal throne, the still ocean and far shining of the stars of God. They trod the Via Sacra, not as captives but as conquerors; they were to see God in the Capitol; it was the path of the apostles, prophets, martyrs, and of that innumerable company whom no man can number; men and women who, under a common appearance, lived the life of faith, and were saved by it; who had not yet what they sought, but waited for it.

Let us, too, wait in faith and patience, learning the lessons of our day and time, and, "showing all good fidelity, that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things,"

rest assured that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity."

Yet let us not undervalue "this present world"—this beauteous and marvellous world, with all its multiplied and manifold arrangements by which and in which we can see the character and handle the Divine Form of the great and good Artificer beneath and beyond, who looks through it and upon us with the eyes of Christ, ever saying, "It is I; be not afraid;" and who gives us all our various duties and privileges here as means whereby we may rise upwards to Himself, and be like Him, knowing and doing what we have seen and see in Him, occupying until He come, working, but meanwhile trusting and being patient and still.

To which end let us take in the full meaning

of His revelation in Christ—"He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Let us not, from a mistaken timidity, empty this of meaning, by saying that it means some arrangement by which those who lay hold of it are safe, or that it is intended by God for some to lay hold of and not others, but let us read it as it is written, "How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" —things surely less precious in themselves and more easily bestowed than the gift of His Son —a gift which bids us with the apostle say, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." Believing this, we are saved. Amen.

## XII.

## THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

"Where is now thy God?"—PSALM xlii. 3.

LET us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Miracles have ceased; and, while they continued, those who wrought them did not set much store on them for the manifestation of God. Where are we, then, to find Him? No doubt in the ordinary manifestations of nature and Providence, and in the evident livingness with which all things proceed from a less perfect to a more perfect state; in the "due season," the seed-time, growth, and harvest, and in the succession of crops, spiritual and material, ever of an higher and holier order, ever pointing to an end, to which all imperfect because finite nature is progressing, an end which is shadowed forth by the words, "that God may *be* all

*in* all." First nature, then the Sonship, finally God!

So assuredly may we read that all the variations lately visible in the character of religious belief arise from the different aspects of natural and of revealed religion which are presented as the development of human society requires and as the increasing needs of humanity demand; so perceive that the recent great accessions to our possessions in the material world, as by the use of steam, of electricity, and other apparatus, have been co-equally and relatively given to us in spiritual things, in an increasing discernment of the meaning of Revelation, and in a higher moral and spiritual knowledge; so understand that the Mediæval and Reformational aspects of truth are now being superseded by a perception of the Fatherly character of God, and of the higher and more practical uses of conscience.

For we must learn to know that revelation is the complement and not the contradiction of nature, and that any interpretation of Scripture which is contrary to nature and conscience must be erroneous. It cannot be that conscience is

not the judge of supreme morality; if it be not the judge of supreme, then it is no judge of morality at all. Assuredly morality here cannot be different from what it is elsewhere; it must be the same in earth and in Heaven; and the judge which is judge in the one place must be also in the other, the laws being the same. Of course if we are no judges of morality, we are no judges of the value of revelation, or of its authority; but in that case we do not know right from wrong, and no revelation therefore need have been given to us. But as we are judges, and as revelation is given because we are, so we must receive and interpret it; we can only be sure of its being contained in Holy Scripture by our sense of right and wrong. In this way we shall find Scripture the complement and explanation of nature, and truly divine. The dividing between nature and revelation, and applying a different rule of morality to each, is at the root of doubt as to the reality of revelation, and of the infidelity which succeeds it.

God is educating the world by the gift of Conscience, of the Scriptures, and of His Son, for the

inheritance of sons, calling men thereby to the knowledge of His purposes, manifesting that these are good, and thus to knowledge and choice, and the power of free choosing. We lose the benefit of the gift if we do not avail ourselves of it, as it is given. It is ours, but it is to be made ours experimentally by search and conviction.

Vicarious or Oracular guidance, as in the Church of Rome, is the frustration of God's purpose, and reduces men to the condition of agents and servants, instead of that of sons. And it is the same with the reception of any particular doctrine, as of Predestination. It must be subject to experiment, and not left to authority merely. We must keep to the Fatherly character of God, and believe that no human logic can be right which, drawing inferences from passages of Holy Writ, brings us into collision with moral consciousness. All inferences which contradict this must be erroneous, as when it is said that "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His own glory, some men are foreordained unto everlasting death."

We must correct, wherever possible, the prevalence of such erroneous and mischievous views. For, where heartily believed, they destroy the filial relation of God and His offspring, and (assigning a morality to God at variance with that enjoined on man) injure morality in the stream by destroying it at the fountain.

And no doubt the time is fast approaching when such hurtful, though merely speculative, statements will be removed from the creeds of believers, and a union and copartnery in love and good works (now much to be wished) be in consequence effected and established. For light has come into the world; evil is now known to be evil, and good to be good; we know that evil is no form of good, but its antagonist, and only a way to good, as a step is trodden on to rise by. We know that both bear fruit ever in accordance with their own natures, fruit never absent, and never interchangeable; but that moral evil, if it arise from ignorance, is terminable by knowledge, or if from sin, by repentance, and that physical evil is terminable by change of form, or eventually by death. So

God's providence leads onward to the more perfect day.

We see that there is a necessary connection between sin and suffering, and one which is never removed; but that there is no necessary connection between sin and humanity; for "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." And it is the will of God that man should turn, and be righteous. God is righteous, and unchangeable; and His unchangeable will is that man should be righteous; it must be so with a righteous and unchangeable God. All God's dealings, therefore, with respect to man have for their object the accomplishment in man of this righteousness.

As neither time nor alteration in the condition of humanity can change the will or character of God, this must always be man's relation towards God—that God is educating him in righteousness. Man may vary, but the nature and purposes of God vary not. He is ever the same, and ever Father; the Judge of quick and

dead; ever dealing with man according to his works; giving the wages belonging to everything, that man may learn the nature of things, and attain eternal blessedness by rejecting the evil and choosing the good.

God is a Saviour, but He saves by delivering man from sin, not from punishment; nay, He delivers from sin *by* punishment. He heals the fountain, not the stream; He deals with the disease, not with the symptoms. In Christ God is a great Physician, entering into the nature of humanity, to disentangle it from the meshes of sin, and to bring it near unto God in an everlasting righteousness.

By the imitation of Christ, by the reception of His life as ours, by the knowledge that He is come in our flesh "taking the manhood into God," by the revelation that we are sons, a power enters into humanity which raises it to a higher level. From being a son of Adam, man becomes a son of God. Jesus, the Son of man, the great first-born, exclaims, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God," giving His flesh for the life of the world; and as many as hear His voice say,

'Come, and I, and I also.' As the Spirit of the Son enters into humanity, man recognises his high position and the nature of the Father; that He is always Father, that man is ever son, ever dealt with as a son, and this for one object, that he may become partaker of the Father's holiness. Thus it is that man lays hold of a higher, yea, an eternal life. Man takes the will of God as his portion from seeing in Christ that it is a blessed will, and in the Spirit of Christ accepting it as such, whatever otherwise at the time it may appear. Thus in Jesus all the families of the earth are blessed, and all intelligent creation is to be blessed; for the "wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

The prospects of the world, as to the future, are surely hopeful; the processes of nature, of intellect, of the spiritual life, all evidently point in one direction, and that to a future higher than the past — to a future of beauty, of truth, and of power, in which all will share. It is at hand: let us make it ours by recognising and taking up our inheritance, and

removing stumbling-blocks from the way of others.

Let us labour to hasten the day which is breaking; labouring with faith and hope, attending to the voice of God within, that voice which interprets the Word, Nature, and Providence without; and let our confidence and comfort be and rest on this, that amidst the war of opinion, and the mysteries of Nature and of Providence, we are all being now taught and led on by God, and called to the knowledge of the truth—though it may be in a different and less sensible way—as Samuel was by a voice without, while signs were yet given, and the Lamp of God visibly shed its light in the Jewish Tabernacle. Let us ever lift up our hearts, and rejoice in the consciousness that what God is, and must necessarily be, so must and will be His creation, a fact to be made manifest in due time, for which in faith we wait and work in the patience of hope and assurance, that, as we have such hope, the cause of our hope is as real as the hope, and no doubt greater and better than the hope itself.

"Every creature which is in heaven, and

on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever"—(Rev. v. 13). Amen.

## XIII.

## MISSIONS.

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."—ROMANS xv. 1.

A CALL of a very remarkable description is now being made for missions to the heathen. It is remarkable in many ways—the way it had origin, the nature of the case, and that such a call should be needed.

It took origin with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, observing a number of Indian students attending the university classes in London, but still continuing heathens, was as much struck with the fact as Pope Gregory was more than a thousand years ago, when he sent Augustine, the Archbishop's first predecessor, to convert the "Angles" into "angels," as he said they would be were they Christians—a coincidence at all events in the character of

the call, and we hope one of happy augury. It has been taken up by the other bishops of England, and by those of Ireland, America, and this country, and also by the Established and Free Churches of Scotland, and has been responded to by the simultaneous observance of a day set apart for the purpose.

The circumstances which gave rise to the call are also remarkable in other ways, but in none, perhaps, more than this, that all the great missionary societies—we believe without exception — make no call for money, of which they seem to have abundance, but for men, and the day was set apart solely for the purpose of stirring up a missionary spirit and for intercession to Almighty God to move the hearts of men in that direction.

The backwardness of professing Christians in the cause of missions is certainly very remarkable; and when we consider the deplorable state of some heathen nations, such as China, the South-Sea Islands, and some parts of Africa, where infanticide and profligacy of the vilest types and all the evils of slavery are carried

on in the face of day, when also we see the abundance of members of the clerical profession at home, and also of men professing Christianity without any apparent occupation, and when we further observe the extraordinary energy, self-denial, and zeal carried by professing Christians into secular pursuits, we fear that we can only explain this backwardness by a deficiency of Christian zeal, or by the diversion of Christian zeal into improper channels.

The first is probably the greater cause; for many have come to believe that Christianity is not all-important, that men can be "good" without it or without any very distinctive character of belief. Indeed, it is in many high quarters deemed sufficient to say that one thing is good in one place and another in another, that all will be judged according to their opportunities, and that God's providence and will arrange all things. And no doubt there is some truth in this statement. But yet we must reflect that many of the things practised by the heathen are positive evils, and that it is impossible that the providence or will of God can be concerned in

them, so that they are good in one place whilst not in another, for in no place can such things be good, and God judges such things already by the misery they produce. An argument like the above, if carried far enough, would put an end to creation, and to God also.

Let us, then, look at such things as they first present themselves—namely, as physical evils. We treat these with such remedies as are in our power; and by medicine and surgery much evil has been abolished. It is not too much to say, for example, that vaccination and chloroform alone have reduced to one-half the physical evils suffered by our fathers. But moral evils are the cause of many, if not of most, physical evils, and to a great extent are themselves curable. Immorality means a violation of the laws of conscience, and it brings with it invariably physical suffering. Morality is the keeping of such laws, and brings with it freedom from suffering. Immorality can be cured. There are remedies for the conscience as there are for the body; and the most powerful of these is the Christian religion. It has been found sufficient

wherever it has been fairly tried. It regenerated the Roman empire at its first outburst, and formed Europe. Wherever Europe—as is now the case in many places—has fallen away from the height of the Christian religion, there, to the extent it has fallen, has immorality or corruption again set in.

The first work of Christianity was effected by special messengers or ministers; and, wherever there is need, the like agency must be resorted to again. There can be no doubt that there is need of it now in heathen lands. But here two questions present themselves. What sort of ministry shall we send? and what have we at our command? The ministry required will be different at different places. The intellectual and polished Hindoo requires a very different agency from the coarse and brutal savage; the civilised inhabitant of China from the untutored islander of the Pacific. Have we such variety at our command? The Societies tell us that we have not; that there is a want of missionaries of every description. We have at our command—that is, of men offering

themselves—next to none; and it must be added, also, that the missions of our Societies have often been carried on by foreigners—chiefly by Germans. What is the reason of this? A paucity of clergy at home? This can hardly be said to be the case. If we look at the numbers designated as "reverend" at home, there are multitudes; perhaps too many. Too much to do at home? No doubt this is one reason; but it is not the sole or even the main reason. The work at home is great and crying; the heathendom of some places at home is greater than that of parts not included in Christendom. The work at home is by no means overtaken. In some places it can scarce be said to be begun, and hardly anywhere is it adequately discharged. But it would be unfair to say that this is from want of clergy. It is rather, we fear, from a character of work on our part little applicable to our times. On Sundays our pulpits are well supplied, and resound with excellent preaching; but too much of the rest of the week is an absolute blank. The churches are then shut, there is little domestic missionary

exertion, and (save, perhaps, in the country parishes of England) little religious intercourse of a missionary or even of a pastoral nature. I take the condemnation to myself. It is possible that a special order of pastors for Scotland is wanted, and of preachers for England. Any way, the work is not overtaken. But the chief reason we believe to be, not the want of workmen, but that the tone is struck upon too low a key. It requires something to raise it to a higher pitch.

It is to be considered, then, whether the drafting off of some of our clergy to the elevating and heroic work of foreign missions would not raise the tone of those who are left behind, as well as carry to those abroad the blessings of religion. And we are not without hope that something in this direction may come to pass if this missionary call is heard. For it cannot be doubted that zeal, if hitherto insufficient, is again stirring amongst us, and that, as in the other Churches, so in the Episcopal, there has been a great and increasing spiritual movement within the last thirty years; and if this zeal in our own com-

munion (according to my own convictions) has been hitherto directed towards insufficient objects, there is no reason to conclude that it should always remain so. It is religious zeal, and if in the providence of God it were raised to higher things, it would be hard to say what it might not accomplish. Assuredly it would be of inestimable benefit if it were carried into missionary work; and for missionary work its energy and capacity for self-sacrifice are invaluable. Such an application of it would give it a sufficient and worthy object, for want of which it has hitherto, in our opinion, been frittered away upon small or even improper objects, unworthy of itself and of the great issues at stake. But such an outcome for its zeal, while accomplishing a worthy object abroad, would relieve the Church at home at the same time of much unnecessary waste and expenditure in controversial strife.

The present call does not contemplate clergy merely, but also other men of pious minds—men and women so piously and zealously disposed as to be willing and anxious to devote themselves to

the work of missions. Such, when found qualified, can easily be endowed with the outward commission. That is the second and inferior qualification, for many called have evidently not the higher calling, else would there be no present want. What is called for is men and women, moved by the Holy Ghost, to go forth unto the heathen. If any such present themselves to me, or to any other to whom authority has been given, anxious to be chosen and sent, it cannot be doubted but that they will find a fitting employment. If any such feel themselves so inwardly moved, and will communicate with my chaplain at Lochgilphead, the fullest attention will be given to their application.

And when we think of the numbers of clergy insufficiently provided for and the number of young men who do not know how to occupy themselves, the numbers who can find no occupation, the numbers who, in search of wealth, of fame, even of a livelihood, or of mere sport and amusement, adventure themselves, and spend days and years in the farthest and most forbidding regions of the globe—in the Arctic and

Torrid Zones—leaving their bones too often to whiten or decay there, or to be carried hither and thither in the currents of the ocean—we marvel that there are so few who, for higher and better things, go not so far, or go not at all. We blame not these going as they go; far from it. We joy and rejoice in their energy and zeal. Would only that it were spent upon a higher and more satisfying object! On the banks of the distant Euphrates is a dry desert, where no man dwells. Unexpectedly you come upon the tomb of the French missionary Besson; you read—"*Expectantes gloriosam spem et adventum Domini nostri Jesu Christi.*" (Looking for that glorious hope and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.) Why are there no more of such? What a tomb! What a resting-place! Have we not found a brother, a death greatly to be envied?

My heart bleeds for the mothers of this country. Nothing on earth is so divine and tender as a mother's heart. She seeks nothing but the happiness of her child, his highest happiness. She sees him grow up; she tends and cherishes him.

One day that well-known form is to go away, perhaps for ever. They must all go into the world, she says. She trusts he will be happy. She is not so occupied with his success. She hopes, however, he will return—that is the chief thing. She is hopeless without this hope. Many do not return; perhaps most do not from the far-away portions of the earth to which they have gone: so she fears. One thing only could console her—one thing only, of which, alas, the mothers of this country know so little—this, that one day her son should come to her and say—'Mother, I go away to distant lands; perhaps I shall, I think I ought, never return. I go on a mission for Christ to the heathen scattered abroad. If I die, mother, we shall meet in a better place; and even now we shall not be divided. You will find me, and I you, everywhere and always, in Christ. I would stay—God knows how gladly—but there is work to do; some one must do it; I delight to do it, and to cast in my little work and life to the great contribution. It is all right, mother; to depart, to be with Christ, is far better—better

for you as for me.' She would feel it was so, and shed no tear, but say, 'Many a time up from my youth have I given thanks to the Lord, but never so much as now.' Why is it that the mothers of this country have no such partings? Why do not they bring up their children to think of this as the object and aim of their lives? Then would they have joy in their sons, joy instead of anxiety and sorrow—joy in their going as in their staying, in their lives as in their deaths—and be afraid of no evil tidings. For nothing new or strange can happen to those for whom death is no evil but a remedy, at once opening Heaven.

And how many are there who, if not afraid, are yet burdened with the anxieties of the day —rich men, who are richest, however, in care, and men likewise who know not how to dispose of themselves, who would find their lives all at once free from burdens and full of enjoyment if they first "burnt their curious books," and taking no thought for to-morrow, left for the east and the west, the north or the south, as they were sent to the great harvest of mankind, the

great work of doing good, of bearing each other's burdens, in the imitation of Jesus Christ!

Yes, "the harvest is truly plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth labourers into His harvest." No doubt we should pray; and a day of intercession has been appointed and kept, and much prayer made. But, after all, is there not something unreal about this very thing? Do we not all know perfectly well what we ought to do? Is the blame with God or with man as to the want of missionary enterprise? If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that He gives us the very mind and spirit of God, how can we pray for that which we have already received? It is a solemn question. The Spirit of God already and always says, and has said, "Come." It is not the host, but the guests which are unprepared; as before, so now men have to be compelled to come to the work and table of the Lord. What then, now, is that compulsion? It is two-fold. First, the pathetic appearance of

the harvest going to waste; and then, that the labourers are not wanted where they are.

The harvest is going to waste; the lives of men, the great and glorious spectacle of humanity, in one sense so sad, in another so encouraging —India, our own, with all its vast plains and gigantic rivers and mountains, its old civilisation, its interesting people—the ancestors of our own—India, where so many bones of our own kindred are interred, so long and so happily ruled and regulated, mainly by our own countrymen—India, in which there is no spot where a Scottish footstep has not trod, and a Scottish heart has not beat; alas! where likewise many a Scottish heart has broken —India, which is truly ours, however, and is now presided over by a chieftain of our own— India, whence so many millions have been derived, which have elevated and adorned the homes of the mother country—what do we not owe to India? And then China, with its teeming myriads, its ancient literature, its strange mixture of good and evil, the traces of an antique and far-reaching morality, now degene-

rated to names and traditions, to immorality and to crime! The South Sea Islanders, with their beauteous forms and luxurious habits, disappearing before their own profligacy, aided no doubt by the lusts and crimes of too many so-called Christians—shall we not help to save, to raise, instead of lowering, so attractive and gifted a race—help, that is, to make them Christian, instead of ourselves becoming Pagan? Alas, the crimes and bad examples of those who should have known better have most stood in the way of the conversion of the heathen! We are not, however, of those who believe that, on the whole, the influence of the European on the native races of the East and South has been injurious. On the contrary, with all their shortcomings, the rule of the British, for example, in Hindostan has been an incalculable blessing to the natives; and their good example as a race in the matters of justice, self-denial, and courage, has gone far to redeem many isolated instances of evil influence. It may be different in China, where both our public and private acts have for the most part been

unworthy. And in the South Seas, with the exception of New Zealand, little but evil has been seen in the lives of Europeans; and probably no missionary exertion now can quite make up for the shortcomings of the past. But, in the main, the influence of the European races has been, if not in a positive, yet in a negative sense, good. It is time, however, that it should assume a higher character —that is, a positive and more distinctive form —that exertions should be made to infuse a real and distinctive Christianity. No doubt much has already been done by isolated exertions, as in India, where the memories of Martyn, Marsden, Heber, Judson, Schwartz, Carey, Duff, and others, are still fresh, and held sacred by all, in New Zealand, where the names of Williams, Patteson, and Selwyn, and in Africa those of Livingstone and Bishop Mackenzie, shine with apostolic lustre. But it is time that more should be done, and many more names of confessors added, and that influences should be exerted on a larger and more continuous scale. What means, then, are there at our disposal?

The labourers are few! Yet we believe that if they were still fewer the work would be better done—better at home, and abroad also. At home, because, as we have already said, so many are not wanted. Required they may be, but wanted—that is, desired—no! That they are required we do not doubt. The Paganism at home, in many respects, is as bad as that of Heathendom. The increase of wages in many places has led but to the increase of immorality and crime. In too many places, man in our country has not yet risen above the animal level, and an increase of means leads only to an increase of animal enjoyment. Our country, in consequence, exhibits spectacles at this moment from which most other parts of Christendom would stand aghast—drunkenness, voracity, filth, utterly unknown in southern Europe, and looked on there with loathing and disgust; but the ministry, so far as yet experienced, has made no impression on it. Whether the coming education will do so remains to be seen; we trust and believe it will. It is time, at all events, that it should be attempted. Were that in progress, the ministry

might then step in, perhaps, with some hope: it might at once, and at this moment, no doubt, by personal and pastoral appeals, do much; but from the pulpit it is powerless, powerless because the subjects to be cured are not present to hear. But we believe that the ministry, as we have said, would be refreshed by a mission to foreign parts; fresh fields and pastures new would do much; here, in many places, it is not wanted—that is, desired—and the Divine command, "When they persecute you in this place, flee ye into another," is not fulfilled. There are many ways of being "persecuted." In the Apostolic times such as were not received were stoned, sawn asunder, crucified, and killed with the sword. With us it is different. But there are many ways short of this whereby a man may not be received, which the usages of society clearly make manifest, and which a little common sense enables one easily to apprehend. There are no barriers more insuperable than the invisible barriers of society. How, then, do we know when we are not received? We shall not speak of Established Churches, because it is

hard for their ministry to know whether they are received or not. Custom, position, and a provided competence all combine to hide from them the real state of the case; but it is not so with those called Free or Voluntary. There the tests are simple, and because severe are read more easily. Can the clergyman, then, be said to be well received who finds his maintenance difficult; who only can achieve it by appeals, collections, and endless schemes for raising money; who lives by such exertions? And are churches well received which exist only by competition, advertisement, and externals? Surely not. It is a false life both for such churches and for their ministry—a life injurious to them both, as it is to Christianity itself. Far better for such to go unto the heathen. Far better—because there the work is unmistakable and called for. There Heaven is open and death is gain; here, on the contrary, in such a case, a living death is followed by a doubtful paradise. For are such desired here? Do they feel they are desired? Is their work a real work, or only fancy work? Alas, for all such as are not sure that their

work is wanted! Our country is full of such; churches and clergy who are not wanted, and who had far better go unto the heathen. For it is to be considered—if the poor are not ministered to by pastoral care—whether the rich have not now all the teaching they require by means of the press. For the administration of the Sacrament, surely one administrator in every parish is enough. We look forward in the years to come to a great efflux of our clergy to foreign missions—to a great and increasing exodus. The call has been heard, the word has gone forth, the time has at last come. The very misery of so many clergy at home has brought on a crisis. Such, often, are the means adopted by God for the inauguration of new movements, and the occupation of fresh territory. He makes the old impossible.

One thing, however, must be steadily kept in view in thus going forth to the heathen—viz., that we do not take to foreign lands the divisions which exist among ourselves. If the immorality which has existed among Christians abroad has gone far to prevent the success there of missions,

the divisions among Christians have done the rest. How are the heathen in such a case to know whom to believe? And the divisions are unnecessary. Alas! we pray against our "unhappy divisions," while most of them are of our own making. Here it may be that tradition, habit, prejudice, ignorance have cut such deep channels that a new surface is impossible; *there* it is not. Preferences for form and such like there may be; but the essentials, as they *are* the same, must *be* the same everywhere. And the first essential is that Christians should "all be of one;" one, because Christians. Not, that is, by artificial and mechanical distinctions, not by the law of a carnal connection, but by the one spirit, the power of an endless life, and the possession of the mind which was in Christ. What that is none of us can doubt. What, however, do we too often see abroad, as at home? That mind? Alas, no; too often but the building up of that which Christ came to destroy—divisions, distinctions, priesthoods, castes. Yet in Christ's kingdom, it was said, there is to be "neither Jew nor Greek, nor bond

nor free, neither male nor female;" as neither, in its glorified state, is there even to be "marriage or giving in marriage." It is, and is to be, a spiritual kingdom, created and kept together by spiritual bonds. The kingdom of Christ is this; this is what He came to set up; this is that which makes all other kingdoms superfluous. But what do we see instead? Too often men but seeking to set up their own kingdoms, and making their own definitions of them. Men sent, for instance, to India to abolish caste, setting up caste, a caste of their own making. This is what the Roman Church has done, and has fallen by so doing. 'I am the truth,' says its chief priest; 'I make the truth, and this is the truth so made'—identifying himself with truth, and making the truth by mechanical processes. From this we separated ourselves at the Reformation. Should we now return to it, and set up again that which we then destroyed? Alas, however, this is done among ourselves, in smaller but similar ways, whereas the spirit alone is the truth, and the true spirit is "the mind which was in Christ Jesus."

We hear great complaints from abroad that missions are not successful. Appeals are made to us at home for men, for money. But is not the cause of the unsuccess too often this, that Christ is not preached, and a system is set up instead—a system which will accept not as its members those who do not enter by its own little gate—a gate which is not that of Christ, for His spirit is not there? Whoso accepts Christ as come in the flesh is born of God, and to be received. Yet such are rejected. And then complaints are made of the unsuccess of missions. There can be no success for things like these. There can be none, for there ought to be none, and so there is none. Official dignities, names, places, are multiplied; definitions, distinctions, added; but no kingdom is set up—no kingdom because there is no king—for the Head of Christ's kingdom is Christ Himself.

Yet let us lift up our hearts. The call for missions from our ecclesiastical representatives is surely encouraging. It is the right note, the true key—one which, if responded

to, will both improve the Church at home, and give a name and inheritance at last to the heathen external to us. It is a glorious and gracious call. Blessed is he that heareth, and still more he that followeth, the voice. How long has the world cried, and its travailing gone on—the creature seeking to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God! We have liberated many after the flesh, let us now liberate them after the spirit. Physically we have manumitted them, let us go on to free them morally. There can be no mistake about the work. Profound as are the mysteries of Providence, afflicting as is the state of the heathen, we are in the presence of no greater difficulty there than we are here in daily life—the degree may be greater, but in kind the difficulty is the same —viz., the existence and presence of evil. The question is the same, and the answer, no doubt, is the same—"Excelsior." That is, we are to be fellow-workers with God. If we say—'Is God then so clearly the enemy of evil, and on the side of good? Is anything other than what

He wills it to be?' I answer in the words of one but lately taken from among us, and of whose moral grandeur I do not think we have yet formed a sufficiently high estimate, Dr. J. M'Leod Campbell, "Hatred may believe this, but love cannot." Love is surely the best of all things, and God Himself must therefore be that; God is accordingly the enemy and antagonist of evil. Love is the best and highest of all things, and therefore one with God, on the side of good, and the enemy of evil, everywhere and always. Going forth, then, to such a warfare, and on such a mission, the presence and power of God are assuredly with us—the inextinguishable goodness of God, the unconquerable love of Christ. They may not always deliver us from *apparent* evil, but they will always deliver us from the evil which is real if we keep close to them; and with the real, the apparent will sooner or later go, for it is but a consequence. To such as are, then, in communication with the heathen the words should ever sound in their ears, "Ye, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and

not to please yourselves;" and, as was said to Joshua in a similar war, "Get thee up, wherefore liest thou thus on thy face?" These are words which carry with them both the will and power of God.

THE END.

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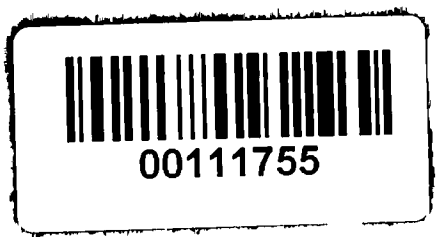
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